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Trump, Twitter and the Death of the American Political Party:
*A Discussion of the Fate of the American Party System before,
during, and after the Presidential Election of 2016*

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Abstract: This paper seeks to address the essential question: *what happened during the presidential election of 2016 and what does this mean for the American party system?* Using qualitative and quantitative analysis, this research suggests that the 2016 election is evidence that domineering policy demanders, such as the Tea Party Movement and Occupy Wall Street, and domineering politicians, such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, used the democratized media to force a top-down realignment of the American party system. A top-down realignment is characterized by the demise of the prominent American political party— an institution fundamental to our political process. Additionally, a top-down realignment is distinct from more traditional theories of bottom-up realignments, such as Burnham’s (1970) theory of critical realignments and Sundquist’s (1983) theory of conflict displacement.

I. Introduction

Catastrophe and chaos: themes that have been on the lips of political journalists, scholars and students alike, as many of us watched with bated breath and white knuckles as the 2016 presidential election unfolded. *Politico* posted, “The 2016 race is a sign that American politics is changing in profound and lasting ways” (Lind 2016). *The New York Times* stated, “Sometime soon, the old coalitions will smash apart and new ones will form” (Brooks 2016). *Salon* warned, “The existing party system is crumbling right before our eyes” (Rosenberg 2016). And even more explicit, Michael Lind wrote:

... 2016 feels like an earthquake — a once-in-a-generation event that will remake American politics. The Republican Party is fracturing around support for Donald Trump. An avowed socialist has made an insurgent challenge for the Democratic Party’s nomination. On left and right, it feels as though a new era is beginning (2016).

Prior to this year’s election, many political pundits contemplated the potential crumbling of the Republican Party; with the changing face of our nation, scholars deemed it highly improbable for the GOP to succeed without altering its stance on immigration (Brownstein 2015; Parker 2015). Yet in 2016, the Republican Party neither changed its stance on immigration nor elected a traditional Republican as president. Instead, the Party nominated Donald Trump: the aggressive attack on the Establishment that no one saw coming.

Up until this election, pundits appeared content focusing on the problems of the Republicans, and questions surrounding the stability of the Democratic Party were few and far between. Yet, as evidence by the surprisingly successful Bernie Sanders movement, the 2016 election highlighted the crippling fractures in the Democratic Party

that, while perhaps not so fundamental as those in the GOP, revealed important challenges for the Democrats moving forward—specifically, a vocal left-wing contingent that feels the Democratic establishment is failing to meet the party’s needs as well as the needs of our country as a whole. To put it bluntly, the presidential election of 2016 spared no one: both party establishments faced severe opposition, leading many to wonder whether the whole American party system is at a tipping point. Thus, my research addresses the following question:

What happened during the presidential election of 2016 and what does this mean for the American party system?

II. Literature Review

A. Historic Realignment Theory:

Foundation

Scholars agree that the birth of realignment theory can be traced back to V.O. Key's article, "A Theory of Critical Elections," published in 1955. In this article, Key lays out the concept of critical elections— the foundation of realignment scholarship. Key's definition of a critical election is "a type of election in which there occurs a sharp and durable electoral realignment between parties" (1955, 16). To illustrate this concept, Key analyzes voting patterns in New England before and after the election of 1928. His analysis shows that Alfred A. Smith, the Democratic presidential nominee in 1928, captured significant support in New England towns that had formerly been Republican strongholds; specifically, towns comprised of "low-income, Catholic, urban voters of recent immigrant stock" who were for the first time voting en masse for the Democratic Party (Key 1955, 4). Key illustrates that these voting patterns were not just sharp but also durable, that these voters remained Democrats during the election of 1932 and throughout the Roosevelt era (1955, 4).

Key contrasts critical elections resulting in realignments with another phenomena which he terms "secular" realignments: where it is not just one critical election that is the impetus for party shifts but instead "the rise and fall of parties may to some degree be the consequence of trends that perhaps persist over decades and elections mark only steps in a more or less continuous creation of new loyalties and decay of old" (1959, 198). Specifically, population groups of varying incomes, religions, occupations or geographic

locations etc. become more or less attached to a particular political party due to a “variety of factors” *overtime*— not because of the “peculiar factors influencing the vote at individual elections” (Key 1959, 199). With that being said, Key acknowledges that in the midst of a secular realignment individual elections can play a role; for example, specific events, campaigns and or “attractive candidates” surrounding a particular election may serve to “retard or to accelerate the long-term trend” (1959, 208). Lastly, while Key does not specify the exact time period necessary for a realignment to be classified as secular, he does say that “a movement that extends over half a century is more persuasive indication of the existence of the phenomenon... than is one that lasts less than a decade” (1959, 1999).

Stages of Political Development and the American Party Systems

William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (1967) took Key’s critical election theory one step further, building a comprehensive outline of the growth of American political parties based on the concept of party realignment. The foundation of their model is based upon what they believe constitutes a political party and a party system. Chambers and Burnham define a political party as “a relatively durable social formation which seeks offices or power in government, exhibits a structure or organization which links leaders at the centers of government to a significant popular following in the political arena and its local enclaves, and generates in-group perspectives or at least symbols of identification or loyalty” (1967, 5). Additionally, they define a party system as “a pattern of interaction in which two or more political parties compete for office or power in government and for the support of the electorate, and must take one

another into account in their behavior in government and in election contests” (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 6).

Using these key concepts, Chambers and Burnham separate the history of American political development into three distinct stages of growth and within those stages, five distinct party systems (1967, 7). Briefly:

The First Party Stage: The first stage, which is synonymous with the first party system, is referred to as the “stage of nation building,” and occurred between 1789-1815 (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 8). A period of “origination,” this stage provided the “essential ingredients for the capacity of the political system to maintain itself,” specifically, through the creation of political organization, such as the recruitment and training of political leaders (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 20- 21). Additionally, political parties acted as “linkage” institutions, providing a “national framework” so that men from across the country could be Federalists or Democratic-Republicans, respectively (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 20). However, political parties were new, weak and decentralized; neither the electorate nor political elites had formed strong partisan attachments yet (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 24).

The election of 1824 is considered by some scholars to be an example of a critical election, precisely because the party system that characterized the first stage underwent significant and durable change (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 26). First, the former Democratic- Republican Party split in half, becoming the Jeffersonian Republicans (those who supported Jefferson for president) and the National Republicans (those who supported Adams for president) (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 27). However, the most essential change was the evolution of various branches of the Democratic- Republican

Party into one, new political party, the Whig Party (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 27). The Whig Party was formed under the leadership of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster and represented a catch-all party– a party for anyone and everyone who opposed Andrew Jackson (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 27). Thus, this election ushered in the second party stage and corresponding second party system: the “elite” Whig Party vs. the party of the people, the Democrats (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 27).

The Second Party Stage: The second party stage and the second party system occurred concurrently from 1828-1860 (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 11). This was a period of “creation,” known as the stage of “establishment of significant form,” where the groundwork from stage one matured into enduring political structures that can still be felt today (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 11). The overwhelming development of the second stage was the democratization of politics, that for the first time politics was no longer an arena reserved solely for the elite (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 12). For example, electoral rules and processes changed significantly; males without property were allowed to vote, and the elite driven process of electing presidential nominees, the King Caucus system, was replaced by the National Convention system (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 28). Additionally, as parties gained strength, their power to organize and delegate responsibility to local branches greatly increased, enabling them to reach wider audiences (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 13). The development of the popular press and improved means of transportation also added to the increase of widespread political party power (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 12). These electoral, organizational and environmental changes allowed for a more politically active electorate; stage two can be characterized

by significant increases in political participation as well as strong partisan identification and loyalty (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 13).

Through the end of the second stage, both major parties avoided confronting the slavery issue; however, tension continued to build until coming to a head in the critical election of 1860 (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 30). Neither the Whigs nor the Democrats took a firm stance on the slavery issue, and thus a third party, the Republican Party, emerged, filling a void created by the major parties and taking a firm anti-slavery stance (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 30). When Abraham Lincoln, the Republican nominee, won the presidency in 1860, the nascent Republican Party replaced the established Whig Party, thus ushering in the third party stage and third party system. The new party system was comprised of the Democrats (divided and struggling) and the young Republican Party (a coalition of “conscience Whigs,” “antislavery Democrats” as well as some “old Free-Soilers” and former members of the “Know-Nothing” Party) (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 30).

The Third Party Stage: The third Party stage, which occurred from 1865-1967,¹ is an umbrella stage; encompassing the third, fourth and fifth party systems (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 14). Unlike the first two stages where parties took on an “innovative” or “creative” role, building the foundation of the American party system, the third party stage is the “derivative stage” where parties “adapt[ed]” or “adjust[ed]” to contextual changes in American society (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 14-15). Overall, parties became “dependent variables,” shifting as new issues arose or in response to

¹ As Chambers and Burnham published in 1967, this is where their political growth model concludes.

socioeconomic changes, relinquishing their previous role as “independent variables,” “guiding” the development of American politics (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 23).

The third party system occurred from 1865-1895 and is also known as the “gilded age for parties,” when political parties garnered “unprecedented levels of power and organization” through party machines (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 33). Party machines were hierarchies controlled by party bosses that would guarantee material goods in return for votes and controlled almost every aspect of political life, from the nomination process to printing of election ballots (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 33). While political machines may have dominated the political arena, booming industry and business dominated all other aspects of life (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 35). The American farmer, particularly the farmers of the Midwest, felt as though they were getting lost in the shuffle, being taken advantage of by the new businesses and further, that they were not being heard by the two dominate parties (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 36). Not unlike the slavery issue in the past, when neither the Democratic nor Republican parties took up the concerns of these frustrated farmers, a third party emerged, the Populists, who sought to bring the concerns of the farming community to the political main stage (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 36). The Populist Party was a “prototypical example” of a secessionist party: a type of third party that emerges when members of the public feel that the dominant political parties are not correctly handling the issues of the day (Bibby and Maisel 2002, 14). While the Republican Party is a very successful and long-lasting example, secessionist parties are often short-lived and their issue positions are either taken up by one of the major parties or they become irrelevant and fade away with the passage of time (Bibby and Maisel 2002, 14).

In the case of the Populist Party, William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic nominee in the critical election of 1896, adopted some populist rhetoric and called for a silver standard in attempts to appeal to the isolated farming population. William McKinley, the Republican nominee, called instead for the gold standard, an appeal to the powerful business interests and urban electorate. In turn, this election brought about the fourth party system, where the Republicans were the party of the North and primarily urban areas versus the Democrats, the party of the south and west, primarily rural areas (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 36-37).

The fourth party system (1896-1932) brought about significant reforms to the all-powerful political machine, ushering a new wave of democratization of politics (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 14). The most influential reform that took place was the institution of direct primaries for nominating candidates for local office; gone were the days where the machine controlled the nomination process, which had significant consequences for the role of political parties (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 14). Up until this point the core party responsibility had been nominating candidates— with this responsibility gone, the strength of party bonds weakened (Chambers and Burnham 1967, 15).

Contextual changes, such as the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, had profound effects on the nation and the political atmosphere. The existing political parties were forced to adjust to the changing environment around them, illustrated by the critical election of 1932. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Democratic nominee, offered hope in the form of his New Deal policies: an active role for the federal government through public works, social welfare programs, pro-union legislation and

farm supports to help combat the difficult economic times. His New Deal policy greatly appealed to a new coalition of voters, a coalition which would become known as “New Deal Democrats” and who would solidify “Democratic electoral dominance for the next thirty years.” This coalition included “urban workers, minorities (African Americans, ethnic Americans, Jews, Roman Catholics) and farmers.” Thus, a new party system was born, the *fifth party system* (1932- 1967), where the parties were sharply divided along class lines and where partisan bickering was no longer about economic policy but over welfare policy and the appropriate role of the federal government (Brewer and Maisel 2016, 39). As Chambers and Burnham published in 1967, this is where their political growth model concludes.

Critical Realignment

Burnham (1970) takes Key’s concept of critical elections and the realignment insight gained from the political growth model to meld a new concept: critical realignment. In sum, Burnham defines this melded concept as follows:

Critical realignments are marked by short, sharp reorganizations of the mass coalitional bases of the major parties which occur at periodic intervals on the national level; are often preceded by major third party revolts which reveal the incapacity of politics as usual to integrate much less aggregate the emergent political demand; are closely associated with abnormal stress in the socioeconomic system; are marked by ideological polarizations and issue-distances between the major parties which are exceptionally large by normal standards; and have durable consequences as constituent acts which determine outer boundaries of policy and general, though not necessarily of policies in detail (1970, 10).

He breaks down this definition, explaining that there are four main components of critical realignments:

1. The first component is that critical realignments are marked by “short-lived but very intense disruptions of traditional patterns of voting behavior” (Burnham 1970, 6). This can happen in multiple ways: a majority party becomes a minority party, party politics increases in competition, or a former area of political competition becomes uncompetitive (Burnham 1970, 6). However, no matter the form of disruption, significant electoral “blocs”– “involving as much as a fifth to a third” of voters– shift their partisan allegiance from one party to another (Burnham 1970, 6).
2. The second dimension of critical realignments is the presence of a critical election, an election where there is “abnormally high intensity” (Burnham 1970, 6). This “intensity” may manifest in the party’s nominating and other party processes such that instead of providing organization and order, party process add to the tension and polarization (Burnham 1970, 7). Often times, this rise in intensity also means that there is a significant increase in political polarization: “issue distances between the parties are markedly increased, and elections tend to involve highly salient issue-clusters” (Burnham 1970, 7). Lastly, with a highly tense and polarized political environment, critical elections are often marked by a high degree of voter participation (Burnham 1970, 8).
3. The third pillar of Burnham’s theory is that critical realignments are cyclical; specifically, realignments have never and do not occur at random (1970, 8). Instead, “there has been a remarkably uniform periodicity in their appearance” (Burnham 1970, 8). Specifically, Burnham argues that realignments happen

“approximately once a generation, or every thirty to thirty-eight years” (1970, 26).

4. The fourth and final facet of critical realignments is that they begin in the electorate, a bottom-up phenomenon (Burnham 1970, 10). Specifically, they often begin as issue disagreements within the electorate, that if not addressed, will continue to build until reaching a “flash-point,” resulting in profound effects for our American political institutions (Burnham 1970, 10).

In addition to their characteristics, Burnham stresses their overall importance as “inevitable” and “necessary” remedies to changing external forces (1970, 182). In periods of political stability and political calmness, the socioeconomic environment peacefully coexists alongside the political realm; however, when America faces significant socioeconomic changes that are not adequately addressed, tension between these two realms builds, making it more and more apparent that the existing political party system is out of alignment with the social world (Burnham 1970, 180-181). Thus, a critical realignment takes place: the “chief tension-management device,” bringing an “underdeveloped political system” in alignment with “the changing socioeconomic conditions” (Burnham 1970, 181).

Burnham concludes by applying his theory of critical realignments to 1970s America. He believed that the fundamental tension America faced was the conflict between the traditional Lockian theory of democracy, “a commitment to an individualist, middle-class and achievement-oriented social value system” (that has traditionally characterized the American system) in contrast to the relatively new concept of “functional collectivism,” which came about primarily through the welfare revolution of

the New Deal (Burnham 1970, 186-188). He mused that a “revolution in values” could occur, where those in favor of a collectivist future would find themselves against a “counterrevolution” of “urban and suburban whites whose values and perceived material interests would be placed in the gravest jeopardy,” epitomized by the George Wallace movement (Burnham 1970, 189). However, if this revolution does not occur, Burnham predicted that socioeconomic changes will continue to develop such that a “decisive triumph of the political right is more likely than not to emerge in the near future” (1970, 192). Further, he believed that the American middle-class was particularly vulnerable to feeling threatened by both international and domestic changes that had occurred since WW2, thus culminating in the support of a stronger, “racist” and/or “militarist” “extreme-right” that would most certainly send our system into another critical realignment (Burnham 1970, 192-193).

Conflict Displacement

James L. Sundquist strays from the original realignment perspective espoused by Key, Chambers and Burnham, by focusing less on the importance of critical elections and more on issue divides, what he calls “cleavages” between the parties (1983, 13).

Sundquist disagrees with Key’s and Chambers and Burnham’s approach of analyzing realignments by looking at the “electoral consequences;” instead, he follows in the path of E.E. Schattschneider and analyzes the cause of critical realignments (1983, 14).

Specifically, his interest is in conflict displacement, how new issues replace old issues, realigning the party system by cleaving the electorate in new ways (Sundquist 1983, 13). Specifically, Sundquist explains that, “an issue that shatters a party system must be from

a grievance² that is both broad and deep.” It must be broad meaning that it is an issue that affects a majority of the electorate— such as the Great Depression— or if a majority is not personally affected, it is an issue that still touches a majority in some way or another— like the abolitionist movement. The issue must also be deep, meaning that grievances are more likely to spur realignments if the electorate believes there are morals at stake.

Sundquist argues that “realignments occur when the crosscutting issue is intrinsically moral— like slavery— or when an issue that may be basically non-moral becomes infused with moral overtones,” for example, when economic policy evolves into a debate about class struggle (Sundquist 1983, 42). If this new issue can be resolved relatively quickly, then it is likely that the parties will go back to “normal” and a major realignment will be averted (1983, 35). However, if the issue is not solved, tensions will continue to build and the new issue will cut through the political parties— as opposed to the old issue, which cut in-between the two parties— creating two polar blocs within each respective party (Sundquist 1983, 35). Based on this foundation, Sundquist produces an altered definition of realignment as “redistributions of party support, of whatever scale or pace, that reflect a change in the structure of the party conflict and hence the establishment of a new line of partisan cleavage on a different axis within the electorate” (1983, 14).

Sundquist lays out five possible scenarios of realignment (or lack thereof) based on this theory of conflict displacement. The first scenario is that no major realignment happens because the new issue is solved before any major shifts can occur (Sundquist 1983, 25). The second scenario is when there is a realignment of the two existing parties, because a new issue forces a new voting bloc to join the opposing party (Sundquist 1983,

² Because Sundquist uses the words grievance and issue interchangeably, I have also done so in the discussion of his work.

26-28). The third scenario is that realignment occurs through the absorption of a third party that has emerged in response to the new issue (Sundquist 1983, 28-30). The fourth scenario is that realignment happens through replacement of one of the major parties; specifically, a new party more adequately addresses the new issue and overtakes an outdated party (Sundquist 1983, 30-32). Lastly, the fifth scenario is that both parties realign; specifically, existing parties are replaced by two new parties that are better suited for the issues of the time (Sundquist 1983, 32-34).

B. Realignment Theory Reimagined:

Politician-Centered Parties

As the American political arena has evolved, political scientists have reimagined and modernized historic realignment theory. One such adaption is the view that parties have become candidate-centered—the weapon of the political elite. This is the theory put forth by John Aldrich, who argues that political parties have become “endogenous” institutions, the “creature of the politicians, the partisan activist and the ambitious office seeker” (1995, 5). The party is at the whim of these political actors, specifically “office-seekers,” conceptualized as those who actively wish to hold political office and seek long, successful political careers (Aldrich 1995, 17). In addition to these office-seekers, parties are also influenced by people Aldrich calls “benefit seekers,” such as party activists, donors, volunteers etc. who have a stake in the party’s success but not to the same degree as the office-seekers (1995, 18). Notably, Aldrich explicitly states that voters are **not** part of the party (1995, 9). While many identify with the party, voters are

targets of the party and act simply as party “consumers,” not members (Aldrich 1995, 19).

The primary reason politicians turn to parties is to achieve their personal goals, specifically to ensure successful political careers (Aldrich 1995, 5). Aldrich finds support for this argument in rational choice theory and ambition theory; politicians turn to political parties out of rational self-interest because it is highly unlikely that they would be able to win a government position without the support of an established party (1955, 7, 22). One may think that this theory promotes a “one and done” phenomenon where politicians turn to parties to win an election and then they turn their backs; however, most politicians expect to have long political careers (Aldrich 1955, 23). Thus, the politician comes back to the political party time and time again, ensuring the durability of the party (Aldrich 1955, 23). However, Aldrich explains that “careerism” is not the only reason that politicians use political parties; they also turn to political parties to get legislation passed (1955, 19). As politicians expect that the party will mobilize voters, they also expect that the party will mobilize congressional support for their legislation (Aldrich 1955, 22).

Based on the essential premise that party is a function of political actors, Aldrich explains that politicians will only associate with political parties that provide a “meaningful” label: that is a label that helps them get elected and/or get their legislation passed (1955, 26). Specifically, a party is only in equilibrium when “it can offer its candidates an even chance of election” (Aldrich 1955, 25). Thus, a party system is said to be in equilibrium when “elections are competitive” because this means that both parties are able to ensure their candidates a good chance of success (Aldrich 1955, 26). When

this is not the case, party change often occurs, spurred by the action of the political actors who, according to Aldrich, were the ones that created America's first political parties and who have been the ones to alter them throughout America's history (1955, 17).

Group-Centered Parties

Other scholars such as Marjorie Hershey (2007) and Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel and John Zaller (2008) have proposed alternatives to Aldrich's politician-centered view of modern political parties. Instead, Cohen et al. (2008) argue that modern political parties are not candidate-centered, but group-centered, a theory that harkens back to the historic scholarship of Schattschneider (1940), David Truman (1950), and Sundquist (1983). Cohen et al. argue that parties are the "creatures of interest groups, ideological activists and others" that all fall under the umbrella term of "policy demanders" (2008, 20). Policy demanders satisfy three criteria: "they are animated by a demand or set of demands; they are politically active on behalf of their demands; and they are numerous enough to be influential" (Cohen et al. 2008, 30). Throughout history policy demanders have included business interests, labor interests, slaveholders, abolitionists, religious traditionalists, greenbackers, farm groups, environmentalists, gun rights activists, immigrant organizations etc. (Cohen et al. 2008, 30). The essential point is that policy demanders are not interested in "winning for the sake of winning office" (as politicians are), but instead they seek to nominate politicians who can ensure the success of policies favorable to their respective causes (Cohen et al. 2008, 31).

The problem is that policy demanders are numerous. Therefore, instead of thousands of groups acting individually, groups combine their resources and form

coalitions so they can have a better chance of electing their preferred candidates (Cohen et al. 2008, 34). Specifically, Cohen et al. explains that coalitions form with the intent of reciprocity. Coalitions pledge financial support and mobilize voters for a specific candidate with the understanding that that politician will be indebted to them once elected (Cohen et al. 2008, 34). This strategy is much more feasible than if a group were to try to persuade a politician who is already in office to take up its causes (Cohen et al. 2008, 34). In sum, Cohen et al. defies the common argument that modern political parties have gotten weaker and more candidate focused and argues that political parties today are strong, group-centered institutions (2008, 24).

While Cohen et al. (2008) emphasize the relationship between political parties and formal, organized groups, Hershey (2007) argues that it is equally important to understand the informal demographic groups that make-up American political party coalitions. Hershey defines a coalition as “the social, economic or other groups most inclined to favor that party’s candidate through good times and bad,” essentially, the types of people that support one party or the other (2007, 118). Further, she explains that there are several factors that have defined party coalitions in the past.

1. The first is socioeconomic status, which can be illustrated by the divide between the Whigs and the Democrats in the second party stage; those who were wealthy and aristocratic were members of the Whig Party whereas those who were less privileged were members of the Democratic Party (Hershey 2007, 123). Today, socioeconomic status divisions still have a role in coalition definition but perhaps not as prominently as they once did. Those who work in lower-paying service jobs and/or blue-collar jobs are more likely to call

themselves Democrats; however, upper-class members are “no longer distinctively Republican” (Hershey 2007, 123). Precisely, as more professionals have joined the ranks of businessmen in the upper class, they have tended away from purely economic concerns to concerns of women’s rights and the environment, leading them to the Democratic Party (Hershey 2007, 123).

2. Coalitions have also been divided on sectional/ regional divides. For example, during the Civil War era the South remained a “stronghold” of the Democratic Party whereas the North was loyal to the Republican Party (Hershey 2007, 125). Today, the “Republican L,” the Rocky Mountain States, the Plains States and the South all are primarily Republican versus the Northeast, which is primarily Democratic (Hershey 2007, 126). Thus while we see that sectional divides are still apparent today, they are very different from what they once were.
3. In addition to socioeconomic differences and sectional/regional divides, coalitions have also been defined by religion. Historically, those of the Jewish faith have tended towards the Democratic Party whereas Protestants have tended towards the Republican Party (Hershey 2007, 126). Today, we see that religion still plays a role in coalition definition– that the traditional patterns still hold– but there has been a significant increase in Evangelical Christians joining the Republican Party and overall “those who consider themselves very religious are now substantially more Republican than Democratic” (Hershey 2007, 126).

4. Race as a foundation for coalitions has a bit of a complicated history.

Traditionally, it was the Republican Party that firmly stood on the anti-slavery position, as the party of Lincoln; however, today it is the Democratic Party that more consistently embodies the value of racial equality (Hershey 2007, 1270). In fact, “there is no closer tie between a social group and a party than between blacks and the Democrats” (Hershey 2007, 127).

5. In addition to race, the changing composition of the United States, specifically the increase in Latino-Americans, has illustrated the importance of ethnicity in modern-day coalition definition. In today’s world, Mexican- Latino’s have tended toward the Democratic Party because of the party’s stance on immigration, whereas Cuban immigrants, who are more conservative across the board, have tended towards the Republican Party (Hershey 2007, 127). However, Hershey argued (in 2007) that the relationship between ethnicity and party remains ever in flux, as both Republicans and Democrats continue to vie for the Latino vote (127).

6. Lastly, gender divides, otherwise known as the “gender gap,” play a role in coalition definition today (Hershey 2007, 128). Specifically, the gender gap refers to the phenomenon through which women, who are more concerned with social programs, have tended towards the Democratic Party because the of party’s emphasis on welfare and education, as opposed to the Republican Party that prioritizes military spending and tax breaks (Hershey 2007, 128).

In sum, when considering all of the facets of coalition definition in modern day, the Democratic coalition has primarily consisted of “big-city dwellers, lower-income and

less educated people” as well as a “high concentration of minority races and religions” in comparison to a predominately higher-income, heavily religious and predominately white group of people who are also mostly conservative and living in rural areas, who form the Republican coalition (Hershey 2007, 132-133).

Like Cohen et al., Hershey emphasizes the reciprocal nature of party coalitions; specifically, that coalitions give their electoral support and in return the party takes stances on issues that would appeal to the sensibilities of their coalitions (Hershey 2007, 118). To keep the support of their respective coalitions, “the party is likely to express solidarity with the groups concerns, to speak its language and to feature some of the group’s leaders in its conventions and campaigns” (Hershey 2007, 128). For example, as Evangelical Christians have tended towards the Republican Party, the Republican Establishment has sought to appease them by opposing gay marriage and incorporating some “faith based initiatives” into their party’s platform (Hershey 2007, 128). However, Hershey (2007) takes the concept of reciprocity one step further, arguing that this is the foundation for party system change. Specifically, when an issue comes along where there is no clear cut position that the party can take that will appease their coalition that is when the party system is threatened. This is precisely what happened during 1960s in regards to Civil Rights: the Democratic Party was completely split between the pro-civil rights contingent in the North and the anti-civil rights contingent in the South (Hershey 2007, 131). When the party took the position of the liberal northern democrats, it completely alienated its southern contingent, forcing a realignment of the parties such that many southern democrats left for the Republican Party– the party of Barry

Goldwater who was vehemently opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Hershey 2007, 131).

C. Additional Perspectives:

Realignment without Revitalization/ Dealignment

Martin P. Wattenberg (1990) and Daniel M. Shea (1999) argue that the American political system has moved past the point where critical realignments (as defined by historic realignment scholars) are possible. Their arguments are founded on a detailed analysis of the several decades leading up to the 1990s, with an emphasis on the 1980s. Specifically, Wattenberg explains that during the 1980s Ronald Reagan was able to inspire a significant increase in Republican support and enact sweeping policy changes, so that the American political party system looked as though it was prime for yet another critical realignment (1990, 133-141). Yet, what instead happened is what Wattenberg terms a “realignment without revitalization,” that although Reagan did unify the Republican party and institute substantial policy change, overall, the American public remained weak partisans, disillusioned with the American political parties (1990, 146). Similarly, but using slightly different terminology, Shea calls this period a *dealignment*: a period characterized by an “unanchored electorate,” that occurs because the electorate moves away from political parties and partisan attachments altogether (1999, 33-41). Both Wattenberg (1990) and Shea (1999) rely on American National Election Study data as well as other polling data, to highlight a significant degree of split ticket voting as well as a very low percentage of citizens who respected and/or trusted the political parties during the 1980s, as evidence for their arguments.

Wattenberg (1990) and Shea (1999) point to the rise of the candidate-centered parties (beginning approximately in the 1960s) as responsible for the occurrence of a realignment without revitalization/ dealignment. Shea provides a brief history of how the parties came to be these candidate-centered parties– a transformation that can be traced back to the sixties (1999, 42). In attempt to revitalize their roles in the political arena, the political parties of the sixties transformed into organizations whose main goal was to raise huge sums of money and serve the needs of their candidate (Shea 1999, 42). Some scholars championed these new parties because they were seen as “resilient creatures,” adapting to the new times, but Shea argued that there was something altogether “different” about these new service- oriented parties; specifically, while both the old and new political parties were concerned with winning elections, the kowtowing to candidates that characterized these new parties was undoubtedly distinct (1999, 42-43).

Wattenberg (1990) stresses the impact that candidate-centered parties have had on the voting decisions of the American public. Specifically, he argues that service-oriented parties have propagated the voting phenomenon that one should cast her ballot “for the man and not the party” (1990, 162). From the sixties onwards, Wattenberg argues that voters began to base their electoral decision on factors such as personality and individual experience, not based on a candidate’s respective party (Wattenberg 1990, 163). In sum, an electorate composed of weak partisans and personality-seekers, leads to the continuation of divided government and most importantly, a party system that is more prone to realignment, but realignments that are “less meaningful” and wholly different from the critical realignments of the past (Wattenberg 1990, 162).

Devolution of Political Parties

In sharp contrast to realignment theory both past and present, Joel Silbey (1990) argues that the American political system has not incurred five stages of party realignment but rather four distinct eras representing the devolution of party prominence. Silbey conceptualizes party prominence by analyzing the changing role that political parties have played, including their ability or lack thereof to control the political arena and how the electorate has perceived them over time (1990, 4). Silbey (1990) calls these four chapters the pre-party, party, post-party and non-party eras; a brief summary of each is provided below.

The pre-party era occurred between 1790-1830s. Silbey, contrary to popular opinion, argues that the Federalists and Democratic- Republicans were not America's first political parties. First, Silbey argues that they "were neither deeply rooted in the political soil nor all encompassing in their influence and importance." The campaign organization that the Federalists and Democratic- Republicans did do was "intermittent" and "ad hoc" and completely elite-driven. Further, the American electorate did not understand the need or contribution of political parties; in fact, there was a "powerful mindset against them." In sum, to label the Federalists and Democratic Republicans as political parties is highly inaccurate; instead, there exists "strong evidence of their weakness, incompleteness and irrelevance as well as hostility toward them" earning the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans the title of "factions organized around temporary issues" (Silbey 1990, 4-5).

The party era occurred immediately afterwards, from 1830-1890s (Silbey 1990, 4). This evolution was due to a changing political climate, specifically an expanding

electorate and the need to form cohesive coalitions in order to win elections and enact specific policies that necessitated a strong party system unlike the weak and fragmented political factions that characterized the previous era (Silbey 1990, 5-6). Thus, the Democratic and Whig Parties formed, representing America's first political parties (Silbey 1990, 7). During this period parties may have changed names and compositions but the overwhelming theme of this period was the prominence of the political parties in American society. Political machines controlled almost every aspect of the political arena and partisan loyalty was extremely high (Silbey 1990, 10). In sum, political parties were "well-disciplined, predictable phalanxes of people deeply committed to powerful, closely competitive institutions designed to fulfill group and individual needs" (Silbey 11, 1990).

The post-party era occurred between the 1890s-1950s and was a time when the previously all-powerful parties underwent a "dramatic shift" (Silbey 1990, 4-11). Powerful legislation undercut the power of the parties and dissembled the political machines (Silbey 1990, 12-13). Additionally, the government took on roles that had been previously filled by the parties, such as social welfare and the institution of a civil service system as opposed to the party-operated patronage system (Silbey 1990, 13). With their power and responsibility greatly diminished, the American political system became increasingly non-partisan; and while political parties retained their electoral organizational roles, elections were not nearly as competitive (Silbey 1990, 11-12). Instead, the partisan passion of the previous era had not only "cooled-off" but also Americans became wary and distrustful of the political parties; there was a pervasive feeling that parties had been manipulating the democratic system for their own benefit (Silbey 1990, 12).

The non-party era or the devolution of political parties occurred simultaneously with the fading of the New Deal Era, from the 1950s on (Silbey 1990, 4, 14). The negativity that had begun in the previous period was exacerbated by the media, whose focus was “cheap,” “sensationalist,” “nonpartisan” stories that were often “cynical about politics” overall (Silbey 1990, 14). Trust in politics and parties “plummeted” and political elections began to emphasize personality of candidates over their partisan affiliations (Silbey 1990, 14-17). Further, the electorate began turning to nonpartisan groups such as economic interest groups to fulfill their electoral needs and/or turning away from politics completely (Silbey 1990, 15-16). A general downtrend of political participation and interest ensued and the proportion of nonvoters continued to grow (Silbey 1990, 16). Those who did continue to vote did not see voting as an affirmation of party loyalty and each election was a “new throw of dice,” highly unpredictable (Silbey 1990, 17)

The Media and Political Parties

The ability to communicate with the masses is central to the existence of political parties; thus a greater discussion of the relationship between the media and political parties— something that is somewhat absent in past and present realignment scholarship— is warranted. Diana Owen (2013) argues that the media has been responsible for significant change in political party responsibilities overtime. Specifically, she argues that there have been three phases in this dynamic relationship; the first of which occurred from the mid 1800s to the 1950s, where political parties relied primarily on partisan newspapers to help mobilize voters and publicize party messages (Owen 2013, 240). The 1960s ushered in the second phase, which occurred until the 1980s and was characterized by the induction of television and the resulting professionalization of political campaigns

(Owen 2013, 241). Television, and more specifically broadcast journalism, focused less on policy and more on candidates and campaigning— what we call today, horse-race journalism (Owen 2013, 241). In response, political campaigns became more like advertising campaigns and consulting firms were the ones recruiting candidates, crafting campaign strategies, fundraising and mobilizing voters— instead of the political parties (Owen 2013, 241).

The last and current phase is referred to as the *new media era*, which began with the adoption of the Internet in the 1990s and continues today as digital media in addition to non-traditional forms of televised media, such as Cable news, have garnered a prominent role in the political arena (Owen 2014, 240-242). Political parties first began engaging with digital media by creating party websites; however, their digital presence has gradually increased overtime and today both parties have become “assertive” in their use of digital media, allowing them to reach wider audiences, deliver personalized content to individual voters, and reclaim some of their lost electoral responsibilities (Owen 2013, 242-254). However, social media has not only provided a boost for mainstream political parties, but also has served as a catalyst for more provocative political movements (Owen 2013, 256). Because of the “decentralized structure,” new media lends itself to grassroots mobilization and oppositional politics— an ideal mechanism for an oppositional movement like the Tea Party (Owen 2013, 256). Further, since Tea Party members remain characteristically distrustful of the mainstream media, social media has allowed supporters to “circumvent” the traditional “media gatekeepers” and grow awareness for the movement (Owen 2013, 257).

New media as an opportunity to “bypass” traditional media gatekeepers is a central focus of Michael Mezey (2017). Mezey (2017) argues that the influx of media outlets over time has led to a “democratization” of the industry, which in turn has had significant repercussions for the political realm. Specifically, if “democratization” is understood as providing multiple options for citizens, then Mezey (2017) says that the influx of media outlets has democratized the industry, taking the power out of the hands of traditional media gatekeepers and giving it to the people, effectively allowing everyone and anyone to become a journalist.

This democratization of the media has led first and foremost to a breakdown of the elite party system. Historically, political parties would nominate established candidates whose names were already widely recognized since media attention was hard to come by. However in today’s media environment, political outsiders— such as Ross Perot, Pat Buchanan and most notably, Donald Trump— have bypassed both media and party gatekeepers by harnessing social media to rapidly increase their name recognition and become legitimate political contenders (Mezey 2017, 7-8).

Additionally, the democratization of the media has catalyzed the transformation of politics into entertainment (Mezey 2017, 3-4). Specifically, the influx of media outlets have drastically increased competition forcing those in the industry to cover what audiences find most appealing, focusing on personality, scandals and horse-race journalism as opposed to the “serious and sober discussions of public events” that used to characterize political coverage (Mezey 2017, 19- 38). As politics has transformed into entertainment, so too in many cases have politicians turned into entertainers; the democratization of the media has led to a blurring of lines between politicians and

celebrities (Mezey 2017, 16-20). Not only have celebrities utilized social media to turn themselves into politicians, but candidates have also turned into celebrities, like making guest appearances on television shows (Mezey 2017, 16-20). Donald Trump is a primary example of the type of candidate who has capitalized on this type of environment; “a master of the media,” Trump understood that he could harness his celebrity status and bypass gatekeepers by appealing directly to followers via social media (Mezey 2017, 9). He also understood how to “exploit the nexus between successful entertainment and successful politics,” proliferating “outrageous” and “provocative” comments (Mezey 2017, 9, 20).

Donald Trump also exemplifies other traits that Mezey (2017) argues are becoming more and more present in today’s political candidates. First is charisma, a quality found in leaders who appeal to followers based on their personality and effective use of rhetoric and symbols, as opposed to their past experience and/ or policy goals (Mezey 2017, 3). Having charisma is not necessarily a negative trait, and past examples of charismatic politicians include former presidents, Reagan and Obama (Mezey 2017, 6). Charisma only becomes problematic when it reaches another level– that of demagoguery (Mezey 2017, 6). Demagogues, go above and beyond compelling rhetoric and personality appeals and instead paint themselves as savior figures: preaching that they are the only ones who can bring structure, stability and prosperity to the country while demonizing their various opponents (Mezey 2017, 4-5). Mezey (2017) also argues that the democratized media environment has encouraged populist candidates. Specifically, the democratization of the media has played a pivotal role in “stoking... a sense of relative deprivation” as portrayals of lavish lifestyles often fill social media

feeds; thus in this environment, populist candidates who paint themselves as the champions of the common man, receive increasingly more attention and support (Mezey 2017, 7-8).

Trump embodied all three of these traits. First, he was charismatic in the sense that he offered no “concrete” policy plans, but instead asked followers to put their blind faith in his “extraordinary abilities” (Mezey 2017, 20). Second, Trump reached the level of a demagogue, because of his characteristic style paranoid and how he continually blamed the downfall of America on Mexican immigrants, Muslims and the government (Mezey 2017, 21). Lastly, he is also an example of a populist candidate as he “packaged himself as the voice of those who have fallen behind economically” and blamed the ills of the common man on Washington, foreigners and the media (Mezey 2017, 22-30).

III. Hypotheses and Methodology

A. Variable Clusters:

When summarizing this literature review, the following seven variable clusters emerge.

1. The presence or absence of **realignment**; either **critical**, **secular** or leading to **dealignment**
2. The impact of **conflict displacement**
3. The impact of **politicians** on political parties
4. The impact of formal **policy demanders** on political parties
5. The impact of **informal coalitions** on political parties
6. The impact of the **democratized media**
7. The **devolution of prominent political parties**

My adaptations of these variable clusters will serve as the foundation for the discussion of my hypotheses.

B. Hypotheses:

Silbey (1990) argues that prominent American political parties have been in decline since the 1890s such that they have reached the current era, referred to as the “non-party era.” His argument is founded on his conception of what he believes defines a political party: *party prominence* (Silbey 1990, 4). According to Silbey (1990), the only truly prominent political parties were the political machines operating from the 1830s to the 1890s. Political machines embodied party prominence because “they came to control

all but a small part of American politics,” were driven by the impulse to “reinforce party loyalty” and were considered “both natural and necessary” by the electorate for the first time in American political history (Silbey 1990, 10). Thus, it appears that parties are *prominent* when they have three components: the ability to control the political arena, the ability to foster respect in the electorate,³ and, the ability to cultivate loyal partisanship.

My hypothesis draws heavily on Silbey’s concept of the decline in prominent political parties; I agree that prominent political parties have been in decline since the end of the political machine. However, I take Silbey’s argument one step further, arguing that decline in prominent political parties has led to a new kind of parties: parties controlled by domineering policy demanders and/or domineering politicians. Thus, my first independent variable, **domineering policy demanders**, is an adaption of Cohen et al.’s definition of policy demanders as “interest groups, ideological activists and others” that “are animated by a demand or set of demands,” that “are politically active on behalf of their demands” and are “numerous enough to be influential” (2008, 30). However, *domineering* policy demanders are those who actively speak out against one or both parties such that they are seen as a threat to the hegemony of one or both party establishments; whose issue demands have garnered significant support among politicians and in the electorate and who have captured significant media attention. Classification as domineering policy demanders requires the fulfillment of all three criteria. I view the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street as examples of these domineering

³ The ability to foster respect in the electorate does not necessarily mean the ability to foster fondness in the electorate (although members of the electorate who were benefitting from the machines were perhaps fond of them) but rather the understanding that the parties are necessary and important in the political arena.

policy demanders and will conduct an analysis of how each fulfills these criteria.

Specifically, I will measure the fulfillment of these three criteria in the following ways:

1. *Actively spoke out against one or both parties such that they are seen as a threat to the hegemony of one or both party establishments:* This will be measured qualitatively and will include an analysis of written statements on official movement websites, spoken comments from leaders affiliated with the movement and/or public actions the movement takes.

Additionally, I will analyze the responses from politicians etc. that these behaviors garner.
2. *Issue demands garnered significant support among politicians and in the electorate:* This will be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively; qualitative data will include an analysis of the politicians who publically associate themselves with either the movements. Quantitative data will include the electoral success of politicians publically affiliated with the movement in addition to poll data tracking how favorably the public perceives the movement.
3. *Captured significant media attention:* This will be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively and will include the analysis of media mentions, the percentage of total coverage the movement receives during its foundational period, and anecdotal examples of print or televised stories.

Similarly, for my second independent variable, I have adapted **domineering politicians** from Aldrich's conception of "ambitious office-seekers," adding that they are presidential nominees who actively speak out against and defy their respective party to the extent that they come to be considered a threat to the hegemony of their respective party's establishment; whose policy positions have garnered them significant support from members of the electorate and who have dominated media coverage of the 2016 presidential election (Aldrich 1995, 17). The first condition is both necessary and sufficient while conditions two and three are contributory; therefore, classification as a domineering politician requires first and foremost the fulfillment of criterion one and then the fulfillment of criteria two and three. I view both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump as this kind of domineering politician and will conduct an analysis of how each fulfills these criteria within the timeframe of the 2016 presidential election⁴. Specifically, I measure the three criteria as follows:

1. *Actively spoke out against and defied their respective party to the extent that they came to be considered a threat to the hegemony of their respective party's establishment:* This will be measured qualitatively, referencing spoken and written comments from the candidates and the responses these statement garnered from politicians of their respective party.

⁴ Specifying my timeframe for analysis of domineering politicians as the "2016 presidential election" is purposefully vague because Sanders and Trump were of course in the presidential election for differing periods of time. Thus, each respective candidate will be analyzed during the time period in which he remained a "viable presidential candidate," which in Trump's case was until November 8, 2016 and in Sanders' case was until July 12, 2016, the date in which he delivered his official speech endorsing Hillary Clinton as the Democratic nominee.

2. *Policy positions garnered them significant support from members of the electorate:* This will be measured quantitatively looking at primary results.
3. *Dominated media coverage of the 2016 presidential election:* This will be measured quantitatively looking at the percent of free/earned media compared to the amount of paid media⁵.

Further, I hypothesize that these domineering politicians and policy demanders have caused a continued devolution of prominent political parties through their use of the **democratized media**— my intervening variable. The democratized media is conceptualized by Mezey as the product of the influx of media outlets, which has led to the dispersion of influence from traditional media gatekeepers to the public (2017, 7). Mezey traces the origin of the democratization process to the implementation of cable television, which “ended the news oligopoly previously enjoyed by television networks and major newspapers” (2017, 4). This process was then propelled forward by the implementation of the Internet and social media, as these outlets provided citizens with the tools to completely bypass all media gatekeepers and effectively become their own journalists (Mezey 2017, 5). In sum, I will follow in the footsteps of Mezey and define the democratization of the media as “reflected in the spread of the cable television and the rise of the Internet and social media” (2017, 7).

Therefore, I will analyze both quantitatively and qualitatively how the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street as well as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, utilized the

⁵ These calculations are based on the analysis of MediaQuant, “a firm that tracks media coverage of each candidate and computes a dollar value based on advertising rates. The mentions are weighted by the reach of the media source, meaning how many people were likely to see it. The calculation also includes traditional media of all types, print, broadcast or otherwise, as well as online-only sources like Facebook, Twitter or Reddit” (Confessore, NYT).

democratized media to the bypass traditional media gatekeepers and usurp power from the American political parties. Specifically, in regards to Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party, I will analyze the role that the democratized media played in the origination of each respective movement and how the democratized media was used to help garner awareness and/or provide organization. In terms of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, I will analyze how they harnessed the resources of the democratized media in comparison to the other 2016 candidates, as well as previous presidential candidates.

In sum, my central hypothesis is:

H (Central): The 2016 election is evidence that domineering politicians and domineering policy demanders have used the democratized media to force a top-down realignment of the American party system.

My conception of a top-down realignment has two components. First, a top-down realignment is conceptualized as the continued devolution of party prominence, as defined by Silbey and discussed above. I will measure the tenants of party prominence in the following ways.

1. *Control of the political arena:* I will measure this condition qualitatively, looking the parties' inability to control the presidential nomination process, as evidence by the rise of party outsider candidates since 2008.
2. *Foster respect in the electorate:* I will analyze poll data tracking the favorability ratings of the major parties, the public sentiment on whether or not a third party is necessary, and the public's perception of the parties ability to handle the most important problem facing the

country. All of these measures seek isolate whether or not the public feels that the major political parties of today are necessary and important players in the political arena.

3. *Ability to cultivate loyal partisanship:* Scholars (Wattenberg 1990; Shea 1999) have often referenced the presence or absence of split ticket voting to measure the general level of partisanship in the electorate at a given time. However, in recent years straight ticket voting has been increasing as the electorate has become more ideologically polarized, and thus it is not an accurate indicator of partisanship in the present environment⁶. Instead, I will measure partisanship by referencing the rise of independent voters overtime as well as poll data that captures whether partisans feel enthusiastic and/or pride towards their own party.

If none of these conditions prove true, then by definition party prominence has declined, thus fulfilling the first criterion of a top-down realignment.

The second criterion of a top-down realignment is that it is precisely *top-down*, meaning that it is spurred by the actions of the political elite, specifically domineering politicians and domineering policy demanders. This is what makes a top-down realignment distinct from more traditional realignments (either critical or secular) as

⁶ According to an analysis of poll data from the Pew Research Center in August 2016, split ticket voting, which was once very common in the 1970s/ 1980s, has been “on a steep decline for more than two decades.” In the 2012 election, only 26 out of the 435 districts (6%) split their votes. At the state level, split ticket voting has also declined. Political observers have yet to pinpoint exactly why this has been happening, but have suggested increase in political polarization, self-sorting and the incumbency advantage as possibly explanations (“Split-ticket districts, once common” 2016).

defined by Key (1955), Burnham (1970) and/or Sundquist (1983) because these traditional realignments were bottom- up and spurred by actions of the masses. The way in which I will measure “top-down-ness” is by illustrating that two alternate, more traditional, bottom-up hypotheses fail to explain what happened in the election of 2016 and the resulting impact on the party system.

H (Alternate A): The 2016 election represents a critical election and will result in critical realignment of the party system.

The variable “**critical election**” will be conceptualized and operationalized based on Burnham’s definition, which contains four conditions, stated below (1970, 6-7).

1. *Disruptions of traditional voting patterns; specifically “as much as a fifth to a third of voters” shift their partisan allegiance from one party to the other.* This will be measured by referencing national exit poll data, specifically cross-referencing a voter’s party ID and the party of the candidate they voted for. The national data will be complemented by an analysis of state-by-state data, in which this years vote margins will be compared to vote margins in previous elections.
2. *“Abnormally high intensity” in the party nomination process. Specifically, “ordinarily accepted ‘rules of the game’ are flouted; the party’s processes, instead of performing their usual integrative functions, themselves contribute to polarization.”* This will be measured qualitatively by analyzing the orderliness or lack thereof in each respective party’s nomination process, and quantitatively by comparing

voting turnout in this year's primaries to voting turnout in the 2008 primaries.

3. *Significant increase in political polarization.* This will be measured by looking at poll data, which tracks respondent's favorability ratings towards the party they are not affiliated with, and respondent's perceptions of political division.
4. *High degree of voting participation:* This will be measured by referencing levels of voting turnout rates in the voting eligible population.

If any of these conditions fails to be met (as all four conditions are necessary for an election to be classified as critical) 2016 cannot be classified as critical election, which means a critical realignment is not possible and thus H (Alternate A) will be rejected.

H (Alternate B): The 2016 election represents another step towards solidifying the secular realignment caused by conflict displacement.

In contrast to a critical realignment, a **secular realignment** is not caused by a critical election but rather Key explains that "the rise and fall of parties may to some degree be the consequence of trends that persist over decades and elections mark only steps in a more or less continuous creation of new loyalties and decay of old" (1959, 198). Specifically, the type of secular realignment referred to in this hypothesis is **conflict displacement**, conceptualized by Sundquist as "redistributions of party support, of whatever scale or pace, that reflect a change in the structure of the party conflict and hence the establishment of a new line of partisan cleavage on a different axis within the

electorate” (1983, 14). In order for conflict displacement to occur, a conflict must be present; specifically, Sundquist specifies that the conflict must be “both broad and deep” (1983, 41-42). The historical examples he cites are the Great Depression and the Abolitionist movement (Sundquist 1983, 41-42).

The potential broad and deep issue that comes to mind regarding the 2016 election is the Recession of 2008. Quantitative data, such as the public perceptions of the state of the economy, will be referenced to determine if the Recession of 2008 constitutes a conflict that is both broad and deep during the 2016 presidential election. Additionally, quantitative data such as polling on the public’s perception of the top issues during the 2016 election, will be used to determine if there is in fact another broad and deep issue in play. In sum, if poll data illustrate that the Recession of 2008 was no longer considered of significant importance to voters in 2016, it cannot constitute a broad and deep conflict. Additionally, if there is not another conflict that stands out in importance to voters, this will show that there is not one conflict that can serve as new line of cleavage and thus conflict displacement is not applicable for this election.

C. A Note on Timeframe:

Silbey (1990) argues that prominent political parties began devolving with the dissolution of the political machines around the 1890s. Instead of analyzing data from the 1890s on, the timeframe for my study is from 2008- 2016. The decision to begin in 2008 is a choice that relates directly to the democratized media. While cable television, the Internet and social media certainly pre-date 2008, before 2008 the political parties were quite hesitate to engage with digital media; it really wasn’t until the Obama campaign

successfully used digital media for grassroots mobilization in '08 that the parties began embracing these new platforms (Owen 2013, 246- 247). Thus, as my study looks at how domineering policy demanders and domineering politicians took advantage of the democratized media environment, I have purposefully chosen to start my analysis in 2008, the year that the political realm actively embraced new media technology⁷.

⁷ The exception to this overall timeframe is my study of domineering politicians, which is limited to the 2016 presidential election, already noted above.

IV. Results

A. Domineering Policy Demanders:

The Tea Party Movement

Since the beginning of the Tea Party movement in 2009, there has been a clear “angrily anti-establishment mind-set” fueling Tea Party supporters— not only against the Democratic Establishment but also the Republican Establishment (Rauch 2016). According to a Pew Research poll conducted in 2011, 54% of Tea Party respondents disapproved of the job that Republican leaders in Congress were doing; by 2013, 71% of Tea Party respondents disapproved of GOP leaders in Congress (“Tea Party Increasingly Unhappy” 2013). Thus, while it is true that the movement was sparked by fervent opposition to the Obama Administration’s Stimulus Package, what is of particular interest for the purpose of my research is how the movement opposed the Republican Party; specifically, how the Tea Party came to dominate the GOP, speaking and acting out such that the movement came to be seen as a threat to the hegemony of the Republican Establishment.

It took very little time for the Tea Party to take the GOP Establishment head-on. In the 2010-midterm elections, Tea Party candidates went head-to-head with GOP-backed candidates, in some cases forcing them off the ballot entirely. Governor Charlie Christ in Florida, Senator Lisa Murkowski in Alaska, Sue Lowdon in Nevada and Representative Mike Castle in Delaware, all lost to Tea Party candidates in their respective primaries (Williamson et al. 2011, 35-56). Tea Party politicians continued to channel this anti-Establishment sentiment into action; one of the most predominate

examples is the House Freedom Caucus's (HFC),⁸ sabotage of GOP legislation. When Representative Tom McClintock from California officially resigned from the HFC, he released a letter in which he detailed the deliberate actions that the Caucus took to undermine numerous pieces of Republican legislation. McClintock included February 27, 2015, when the HFC teamed up with the Democrats to defeat the Republican "stop-gap bill" that sought to avoid a shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security while allowing the Chamber to continue to debate funding for Obama's amnesty orders for illegal immigrants (McClintock 2015). He also wrote about when the House Freedom Caucus teamed up with the Democrats to oppose the Republican free-trade bill in May of 2015; and again, when the HFC threatened to do the same thing to oppose the consideration of Republican's Resolution of Disapproval on the Iran Nuclear Agreement (McClintock 2015). Time and time again the Freedom Caucus stood with the Democrats to intentionally strike down GOP legislation. According to McClintock, a "common theme" through each of these examples was "a willingness— indeed, an eagerness to strip the House Republican majority of its ability to set the House agenda" and further, that the Caucus served to "undermine" the promotion of "conservative principles"— the very purpose of its existence (McClintock 2015). McClintock was not the only respected Republican politician who felt that the HFC was a dangerous thing; Republican Representative Bill Flores from Texas accused the Tea Party of attempting to "burn the House down" (Herszenhorn 2015). Republican Representative David Nunes from California, called the Freedom Caucus "lemmings with suicide vests," and Brian Walsh, former political director for the National Republican Congressional Committee,

⁸ The House Freedom Caucus was established in 2015, and is a spin-off of the largely inactive House Tea Party Caucus, founded in July of 2010 (Marcos 2015; Lorber 2010)

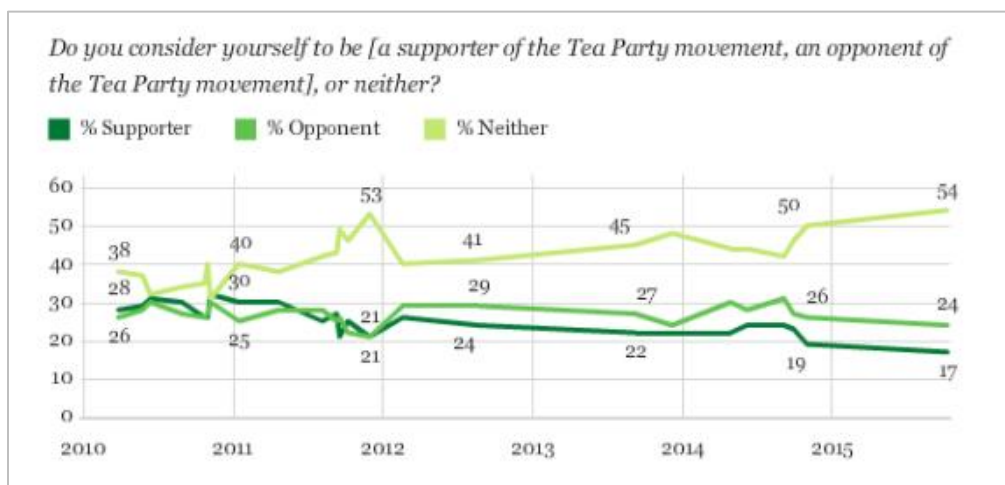
compared the HFC to cancer, calling for the need to “radiate it” (Lizza 2015; Brandon 2016).

It was precisely this kind of sabotage that led to the ousting of Republican House Speaker, John Boehner– another painfully clear example of the Tea Party movement threatening the Republican Establishment. Each time that the HFC teamed up with the Democrats to strike down another piece of legislation, Boehner’s grip on the House dwindled (Lizza 2015). Finally reaching a climax, Representative Raul Labrador from Idaho, one of the most prominent faces and strategists of the HFC, delivered an ultimatum to Boehner, saying: “you have two choices, Mr. Speaker: either you change the way you’re running this place, which you have been unwilling to do, or you step down” (Lizza 2015). The following morning Speaker Boehner announced that he would be resigning (Lizza 2015). Taking down numerous Republican candidates in the 2010 primaries, vehemently opposing Republican legislation and forcing Speaker Boehner to resign, are all clear indications that the Tea Party serves as an active and present threat to the GOP Establishment.

Even with the movement’s threatening behavior, the Tea Party received support not only on the Hill but also countrywide– thus fulfilling the second criterion for domineering policy demanders. In the 2010 midterms, Tea Party candidates won forty-four total races, including five Senate seats and thirty-nine House seats (“How the Tea Party Fared” 2010). According to Pew Research 2010 exit polls, “41% of voters said that they supported the Tea Party political movement including 21% who strongly support it” in comparison to the 31% of voters who said that they oppose it (“A Clear Rejection” 2010). Additionally, support for the Tea Party has continued to remain prevalent even

several years after its initial founding. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of respondents who are supporters of the Tea Party movement, according to a Gallup poll conducted from March of 2010 to October of 2015 (“Tea Party Movement” 2016). While more recently the percent of supporters has dropped slightly, around 17% of respondents in October of 2015 still consider themselves to be supporters of the movement (“Tea Party Movement” 2016).

Figure 1: Support for Tea Party Movement, 2010-2015



Source: “Tea Party Increasingly Unhappy with GOP Leadership” 2013

Lastly, the Tea Party has also managed to capture significant television and print media attention. During the foundational protests in mid-April of 2009, 7% of all news coverage was devoted entirely to the movement (DiMaggio 2011, 12). In the two weeks prior to the 2010 elections (from October 26 to November 8) the Tea Party received extensive coverage from both televised and print media: 151 mentions from the *NYT*, 108 mentions from the *Washington Post*, 188 mentions from CNN, 90 mentions from Fox News, 69 mentions from ABC, 65 mentions from NBC and 32 mentions from CBS (DiMaggio 2011, 13). On election night in 2010, the terms “tea party or tea parties”

received 364 mentions on cable and network TV, second only to “Obama” (“Television—Tea Party and Tea Leaves” 2010). One outlet in particular— Fox News— has stood out as one providing the most consistent coverage of the movement; Fox began covering the movement even before the prominent Tax Day rallies in 2009 and continues to provide loyal coverage today (Williamson et al. 2011, 29). Since Fox News is the top cable news network with an average of more than 2.4 million primetime viewers, it is evident that Tea Party coverage is being pretty widely distributed to the public (Soergel 2016). Overall, it is evident that the Tea Party movement has received wide-ranging televised and print media coverage. In sum, all three criteria are fulfilled thus illustrating that the Tea Party movement constitutes as domineering policy demanders.

Occupy Wall Street

The Occupy Wall Street movement (Occupy for short) was catalyzed by a July 13, 2011 blog post published by *Adbusters*, a radical magazine, that called for “a shift in revolutionary tactics,” encouraging tens of thousands of people to “set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and Occupy Wall Street for a few months” (Chappell 2011). While the post specified no official leadership or official purpose, only that “once there, we shall incessantly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices” which would be determined by the protestors themselves, the post did make one explicit issue demand: “[we] demand that Barack Obama ordain a Presidential Commission tasked with ending the influence money has over our representatives in Washington. It’s time for Democracy Not Corporatocracy, we’re doomed without it” (Chappell 2011). From this initial catalyst, one can gather that at the core of the Occupy movement was purposeful,

disruptive action targeted at the whole political establishment. Thus, an analysis of how Occupy acted out against the whole political establishment (rather than one specific party or the other) and how the movement came to be seen as a threat to the hegemony of political establishment, will follow.

On July 26, 2011, the official Occupy Wall Street website was launched, including a written statement of the movement's purpose:

#ows is fighting back against the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process, and the role of Wall Street in creating an economic collapse that has caused the greatest recession in generations. The movement is inspired by popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, and aims to fight back against the richest 1% of people that are writing the rules of an unfair global economy that is foreclosing on our future.

While the movements' purpose is wide reaching, at the heart of Occupy was the urge to take the current political establishment head-on, as indicated by the line in bold. The way that Occupy chose to take on the political establishment was mostly via prolonged action, which included the September 17th rally where protestors set up their camps in lower Manhattan's Zuccotti Park; the second march to Union Square on September 24th and the several weeks of prolonged occupation (Chappell 2011). Of course these are only examples of the Occupy protests that occurred in New York, but there were affiliated movements nationally and globally which will be discussed at length below (Chappell 2011).

It was precisely these kinds of movements that provoked wide- ranging concern among Democratic and Republican politicians. These concerns were not only regarding the physical "danger" that the movement caused, such as Majority House Leader Eric Cantor expressing concern for "the growing mobs occupying Wall Street and other cities around the country" or Governor Cuomo insinuating that the movement represented a

threat to the “rule of law,” but also inherent in these statements (and explicit in others) was the perception that the movement represented a threat to the stability of the political establishment (Neal 2017). Mitt Romney warned that the movement represented “dangerous... class warfare” and Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor under Bill Clinton, warned of the implication of the movement on the political parties; specifically, saying “if Occupy Wall Street coalesces into something like a real movement, the Democratic Party may have more difficulty digesting it than the GOP had with the Tea Party” (Lichtblau 2011).

While some members of the political establishment viewed the behavior of the protestors as a threat, the issue demands of the movement resonated with some politicians and certainly the public, drawing support nationally and globally. Similar protests cropped up throughout the country and the world, including ones in Boston, Seattle, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Denver, Tucson, New Orleans, Salt Lake City, London, Seoul, Rome, Manila, Berlin, Mumbai, Amsterdam, Paris and Hong Kong (DeLuca et al. 2012, 484). In total, it is estimated that there were between 750- 2,500 Occupy sites in around 950 cities and 82 countries (Chappell 2011). Additionally, during the heart of the movement in 2011, a Rasmussen poll found that 33% of respondents had a favorable opinion of the protestors—19 points higher than the favorability of Congress at the time (Chappell 2011). The movement also received the backing of several unions including the AFL-CIO, United Federation of Teachers, Communications Workers of America, United Auto Workers, National Nurses United and others (“Occupy Wall Street Gets Union Backing” 2011). Lastly, Occupy received support from several politicians; some prominent examples included the Chairs of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Keith

Ellison and Raul Grijalva; the Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, John Larson, and Wisconsin Senator, Russ Feingold, all of whom drafted official statements of support (Downie 2011). The movement also managed to capture significant televised and print media attention: 7% of the “overall newshole” from October 2-9 in 2011 was dedicated to coverage of Occupy. Occupy pushed coverage of the economy up to 22% of the newshole from October 3-9, which had only been at 14% the preceding week. Overall, in the first month of the Occupy protests, the nation’s top five print outlets ran a total of 104 stories detailing the movement; broken-down by outlet this was 46 stories in *The New York Times*, 23 in the *Washington Post*, 17 in *Los Angeles Times*, 10 in the *Wall Street Journal*, and 8 in *USA Today* (DeLuca et al. 2012, 484- 500). Overall, Occupy proves to fulfill all three necessary criteria, thus qualifying as domineering policy demanders.

The Keystone Pipeline Movement and Black Lives Matter: Why They Don't Qualify

One may wonder why two other key movements, Keystone Pipeline and Black Lives Matter, are not included as examples of domineering policy demanders. One of the main reasons is temporal; while the Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street arguably had direct and significant impacts on this presidential election, Keystone Pipeline and Black Lives Matter did not play any role or did not play nearly as prominent a role, in this election. Even more importantly, however, is that in order to be classified as domineering policy demanders, these movements must in fact be “domineering,” meaning that they actively speak out against one or both parties such that they are seen as a threat to the hegemony of one or both party establishments. While both Black Lives Matter and the Keystone Pipeline protests actively raised awareness for their respective issues, they did

not move beyond issue-centered protests into the realm of threat to one of both party's establishments, thus disqualifying them from this classification.

B. Domineering Politicians:

Trump

From the very beginning of his Donald Trump's campaign, he made his sentiments regarding the Republican Establishment painfully clear. Throughout his campaign he actively spoke out against the "mess" that was the GOP Establishment, often tweeting similar sentiments (see fig. 2) (Walsh 2016). In addition to overt anti-GOP comments and tweets, Trump also attacked individual members of the Establishment. For example, he fired his "Establishment-bred campaign chairman," Paul Manafort, and replaced him with Breitbart's Stephen Bannon, prompting widespread concern within the party. Vin Weber, a lobbyist and former Minnesota Congressman, who advised Romney, said that Trump's decision to replace Manafort with Bannon shows "that there's going to battle inside our party for a long time to come." Peter Wehner, Director of White House Office of Strategic Initiatives under Bush, expressed even more grave concerns regarding an Alt-Right figure holding a position of such influence in Trump's campaign; Wehner said that while "movements... with toxic and nasty stuff" have traditionally been "kept on the outer fringes of American political life," by appointing Bannon, Trump allowed such a movement to become "command and control at headquarters" (Tumulty 2016).

Figure 2: Trump Anti-Establishment Tweet March 3, 2016

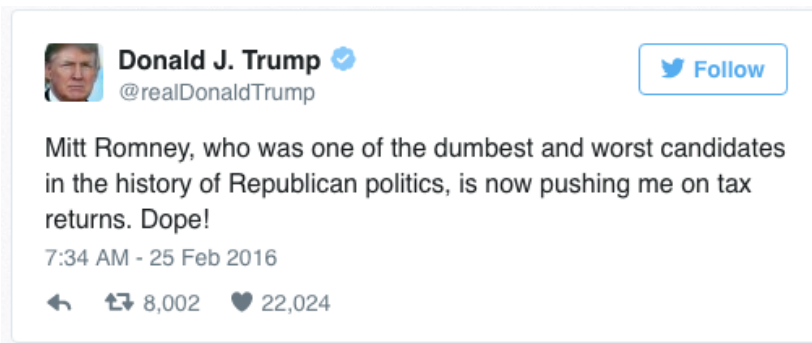
Source: Bradner 2016

Trump also targeted Senator John McCain, tweeting “the very foul mouthed Sen. John McCain begged for my support during his primary (I gave, he won), then dropped me over locker room remarks!” and criticized George Bush in a debate in North Augusta, South Carolina, saying that Bush “lied” about weapons of mass destruction, untruthfully leading the country into war in Iraq (Krieg 2016; Gabriel 2016). However, the foremost example of Trump singling out a GOP Establishment politician were his public quarrels with Mitt Romney— one of the most well-known and well-respected figures in the Republican Establishment. The quarrel can be traced back to Romney’s anti- Trump speech that he felt compelled to give because of his strong belief that Trump represented a danger not only to the Republican Party and to conservative values but also to the country as a whole. In his speech, Romney warned the American people that not only does Trump not “represent the values and policies of conservatism” but also the danger is even greater than that:

His domestic policies would lead to recession. His foreign policies would make America and the world less safe. He has neither the temperament nor the judgment to be president and his personal qualities would mean that America would cease to be a shining city on a hill (“Transcript” 2016).

In sum, he put it bluntly for the American people that “if we Republicans choose Donald Trump as our nominee, the prospects for a safe and prosperous future are greatly diminished” (“Transcript” 2016). Donald Trump did not take Romney’s comments lightly and turned to Twitter (see fig. 3 and 4) to voice his anger and fight back. Weber, Wehner and Romney were not the only ones who publically spoke out against the dangers of Trump. Overall, more than 160 Republican leaders publically said that they would not vote for Trump, withdrew their endorsement, or publically called for him to step down as the Party’s nominee (Yourish, Buchanan and Parlapiano 2016).

Figure 3: Anti-Romney Tweet, Example #1



Source: Collins 2016

Figure 4: Anti-Romney Tweet, Example #2



Source: Collins 2016

Additionally, Trump also publically defied Republican Party values.⁹ Specifically, when one compares Trump's positions on key issues to the Republican Party's 2012 Platform (the most recent formal party declaration on principles prior to 2016), it is evident that Trump clearly diverged from traditionally held Party stances (Krieg 2016). Trump's position on trade was one of the most overt examples; according to the '12 Republican Platform, the GOP committed to "principles of open markets" and the continuance of free trade, specifically the potential for a "worldwide multilateral agreement among nations committed to the principles of open markets... in which free trade will truly be fair trade for all conceived" (Krieg 2016). Trump, quite the opposite, publically put down fundamental free trade deals like NAFTA and the TPP, arguing that, "one factor driving the economic devastation is America's disastrous trade policies" (Krieg 2016).

Similarly, on the topic of jobs, the GOP stated in 2012 that, "the best jobs program is economic growth and not made-in-Washington package[s] of subsidies and spending to create artificial jobs" (Krieg 2016). According Trump, the best jobs provider are infrastructure programs that require a lot of government spending and that sound a lot like the "made-in-Washington packages" the GOP spoke so vehemently against (Krieg 2016). Lastly, while the Republican Party's 2012 platform called for a decrease in Medicare/ Social Security spending and an increase in private plans, during his campaign Trump promised no cuts and to leave Medicare and Social Security alone (Krieg 2016). It was precisely stances like these that brandished Trump a "cancer on conservatism,"

⁹ The assumption I am making is that "Republican Party values" are synonymous with conservative values; this assumption is based on the cataclysmic change that occurred after the Reagan Revolution of 1980, which turned the GOP solidly conservative on both economic and social issues from the 1980s until present day (1983, 412- 440).

according to former governor of Texas, Rick Perry, and similarly, a “menace to American Conservatism,” according to the conservative news beacon, *The National Review* (Klein 2016).

With that said, Trump was able to garner the support of Republican politicians as well. According to analysis by *Time Magazine* on October 13, after the tape was released in which Trump was recorded as saying vulgar comments about women, 21 out of the 31 Republican Governors supported Trump; 36 Senators out of the 54 Republican Senators and 182 Representatives out of the 246 Republican Representatives (Johnson and Wilson 2016).

Finally, in terms of dominating the conversation, it’s practically a no-brainer. According to MediaQuant, Trump received \$1.9 billion worth of free media compared to the \$10 million he spent on paid media (Confessore and Yourish 2016). Texas Senator Ted Cruz was second to Trump in the Republican Party primaries, receiving \$313 million worth of free media, to his \$22 million of paid media; Bush and Rubio both received \$214 million of paid media, having spent \$82 and \$55 million, respectively on paid media (Confessore and Yourish 2016). Overall, it is evident that Trump fulfills all three criteria, thus qualifying as a domineering politician.

Bernie Sanders

Bernie Sanders also made it clear that a core tenant of his campaign was to take his Party’s Establishment head-on. First, he ran for the Democratic nomination as a self-described Democratic Socialist; second, he positioned himself as a foil to his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, by referring to her as the “candidate of the establishment”

(Dickinson 2015). Additionally, Sanders was known for his provocative anti-establishment proclamations that preached throughout the entirety of his campaign. He proclaimed such things like “we are taking on virtually the entire Democratic Establishment” or repeat the sentiment that the Establishment needs to “reach a fundamental conclusion” on whether “we are on the side of the working people or big-money interests” (Milbank 2016). Specifically, Sanders vehemently believed that the Democratic Party was reliant on “big money campaign contributions” and is a party with “limited participation and limited energy” (Seitz- Wald 2016). His sentiments can be summed up in this particularly illustrative quote:

Frankly, what the Democratic Party is about is running around to rich people's homes and raising obscene sums of money from wealthy people. What we need to do is to say to working-class people – we are on your side (Whitesides 2016).

Sanders method of choice for changing the “status-quo” of the Democratic Party was by calling for a “political revolution” (Seitz-Wald 2016; Bernie Website 2017). As he said in an interview for *Rolling Stone* magazine, “we need millions of people to stand up and fight back to demand a government that represents all of us, not just the one percent. I’m trying to create a movement. That is what my campaign is all about” (Dickinson 2015). Specifically, he called for the American people to engage in a “bottom on up” revolution where “millions of people say ‘enough is enough’ and become in engaged in the fight for justice” (Bernie Website 2017). This political revolution would fight for to end the “corrupt” campaign finance system; fight to end the “grotesque level of wealth and income inequality;” fight to make public colleges and universities free for all and fight to guarantee universal health care as “a right and not a privilege” (Bernie Website 2017).

In addition to the broad ways in which Sander's defied his party, it is necessary to pinpoint some more concrete examples. One such example is when the Sanders campaign took legal action against the Democratic National Committee, filing suit against the DNC's motion to cut the campaign's access to essential voter data (Foran 2015). Since voter data are essential for a campaign's ability to fundraise, Sanders campaign saw this DNC motion as institutionalized "sabotage," or as Jeff Weaver, the Sanders campaign manager, put it, an "active attempt" by the "leadership of the Democratic National Committee" to "undermine our campaign" (Foran 2016).

Attacks on the DNC and the DNC leadership were a constant throughout the Sanders campaign. Even after this initial incident, Sanders wrote to DNC Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz regarding another infraction on the part of the DNC in regards to the Sanders campaign. Specifically, Sanders wrote that the democratic primary process "is set up to produce an unfair, one-sided result," thus, "we are prepared to mobilize our delegates to force as many votes as necessary to amend the platform and rules on the floor of the convention" (Foran 2016). Sanders even went so far as to launch a personal attack on Chairwoman Wasserman Schulz, announcing that he would not reappoint her as DNC chairwoman if he won the presidency, saying on *Face the Nation* that he didn't think "she was the kind of chair the Democratic Party need[ed]" (Whitesides 2016).

This kind of bold-faced defiance of Party infrastructure trickled down into Sanders supporters. At the Nevada Democratic Convention, Sanders supporters actively booed speakers, but also they overtook the stage and threw chairs, prompting security to shut down the event early (Milbank 2016). Additionally, supporters sent abusive texts to

the chairwoman of the convention, Roberta Lange (Werner 2016). This kind of behavior caused many in the party to be fearful and worry about unrest at the National Democratic Nomination Convention in Philadelphia (Werner 2016). It is true that these are the actions of Sanders supporters and not actions of the candidate himself; however why I use this as an example of Sanders himself threatening the hegemony of the Democratic Party is because of his rather “lukewarm response” that some insinuated was a statement of tacit support of his supporter’s behavior (Werner 2016). Sanders responded saying that:

Party leaders in Nevada, for example, claim that the Sanders campaign has a ‘penchant for violence.’ That is nonsense. Our campaign has held giant rallies all across this country, including in high-crime areas, and there have been zero reports of violence (Neidig 2016).

Lastly, one of the predominate ways in which Sanders’ actions threatened the hegemony of the Democratic Party was that even when it was numerically impossible for him to win the nomination he remained in the race. For example, in mid- June 2016 when it was highly obvious that Clinton would be the Democratic nominee, he refused to concede and against urged his supporters to continue the fight “into the Democratic National Convention on July 25 in Philadelphia, where we will have more than 1,900 delegates” (Fang 2016). Sanders chose to stay in the race and urged his supporters to continue the revolution against the dismay of Democratic Party officials, including Harry Reid and other senior members who tried to persuade him to publically leave the race (Raju 2016). While it became clear that Sanders chose to stay in the race for a prolonged period not necessarily to beat Clinton but rather to play an influential role in the crafting of the 2016 Party Platform, he created unease in the party and in the electorate (Fang 2016). As a measure of comparison, Clinton conceded to Obama in the 2008 race on June

7; instead, Bernie did not officially endorse Clinton until July 12 of 2016 (Snow and Harper 2008; Bernie Website 2016).

Even though Sanders did not end up winning the Democratic Party's nomination, his policy positions did garner him significant support from members of the electorate. As the runner up to Clinton, Sanders won 1,893 delegates by capturing 23 states to Clinton's 34 ("CNN Delegate Estimate" 2016). Additionally, Sanders was able to dominate the media coverage acquiring \$321 million worth of free media compared to his \$28 million paid media. The only other two candidates, who received more earned media than he were the two candidates who won their respective party's nominations. Thus, aside from Trump and Clinton, Sanders received more earned media than every other candidate on both sides of the aisle. Most notably, Sanders received more earned media than Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio, who spent \$82 million and \$55 million respectively on paid media, compared to Sanders \$28 million (Confessore and Yourish 2016).

Ted Cruz: Why He Doesn't Qualify

One may be wondering why Ted Cruz does not qualify as a domineering politician. As was discussed in the hypothesis section, the first condition (actively speaks out against and defies their respective party to the extent that they are considered a threat to the hegemony of their respective party's establishment) is a necessary and sufficient condition, meaning that this criterion alone must be fulfilled to be considered. Hillary Clinton for example, may have received significant support for her policy positions (condition two) and have dominated the media coverage (condition three); however, since she did not speak out against the Democratic Party Establishment, she cannot be

considered. Ted Cruz did speak out against the Republican Establishment. In fact the majority of his political career has been spent fighting against the whole political establishment— his own party included. For example in 2012 when he ran for the open Senate seat in Texas against the David Dewhurst, the lieutenant governor of Texas who was supported by almost every Texas Republican and was considered the “very definition of the GOP Establishment” (Phillips 2015). Once in government he did almost everything he could to “infuriate” his party’s establishment: attempting to shutdown the government over Obamacare dispute, going head-to-head with John Boehner after attempting to rally an insurgency over budget issues and proclaiming Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell, a “liar” in the chamber (Collinson 2016; Phillips 2016).

While Cruz does fulfill criterion number one, he does not fulfill the other two contributory criteria. Cruz is unable to garner the level of support from the electorate that Trump did. The runner up for the Republican nomination, Cruz won 563 total delegates to Trump’s 1542 (“Republican Party” 2016). Additionally, Trump’s ability to dominate the media coverage, dwarfs Cruz’s media coverage. Cruz spent over twice as much on paid media— \$22 million to Trump’s \$10 million— and received \$313 million worth of free media coverage in comparison to Trump’s \$1,898 million (Confessore and Yourish 2016). In sum, while Cruz does fulfill condition one he fails conditions one and two, thus disqualifying him from the classification of domineering politician¹⁰.

¹⁰ One could argue that other politicians like Ben Carson and certainly the two third party candidates, Jill Stein and Gary Johnson, fulfill criterion one but like Cruz are unable to fulfill the other two conditions. By specifying that domineering politicians must fulfill the necessary and sufficient criterion one in addition to the two contributory conditions, I am purposely differentiating between simply anti-establishment politicians and my new classification of “domineering” politicians.

C. Democratization of the Media:

Validating Mezey's Core Assumption

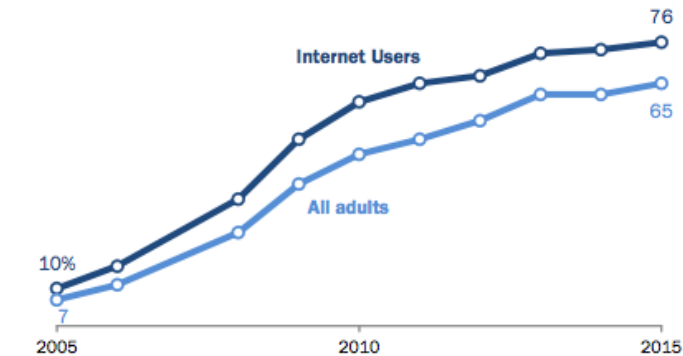
Mezey's democratization of the media argument builds on the core assumption that we live in an environment where cable television, the Internet and social media play a central role in our lives. Before I demonstrate how domineering policy demanders and domineering politicians have utilized the democratized media environment to their advantage, I will begin by validating Mezey's assumption, showing the prominent role that these three outlet play today in society overall, and specifically in regards to political life.

Regarding general Internet use, according to Pew Research Center poll data, in 2016 approximately nine-in-ten American adults use the Internet (88%); that represents a significant increase from 2000, when only 52% of American adults were online ("Internet/ Broadband Fact Sheet" 2017). In terms of social media/ networking sites, Pew found that 65% of American adults use social networking sites in 2015 in comparison to only 7% who used social media networking sites in 2005— nearly a tenfold jump (Perrin 2015). Breaking this statistic down, Pew found that in 2016, 68% of all US adults use Facebook, 28% use Instagram, 26% use Pinterest, 25% use LinkedIn and 21% use Twitter (Greenwood et al. 2016). In regards to the use of social media specifically for news consumption, a 2016 Pew Research poll found that a majority of US adults— 62%— get their news on social media, including 18% who do so often, in contrast to only 49% in 2012 who responded (to a slightly different question) that they see news on social media (Gottfried and Shearer 2016). In regards to new media and this election, a January 2016 Pew poll found that 65% of US adults learned about the presidential election from

digital sources (in the week leading up to the survey), including 44% from social networking sites (Lu and Holcomb 2016). As a point of comparison, when Pew asked a similar question in October of 2012, only 17% of US adults responded that they “regularly turned to any social media platforms for campaign news” (Lu and Holcomb 2016).

Figure 5: Social Network Usage Among American Adults

% of all American adults and internet-using adults who use at least one social networking site



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Perrin 2015

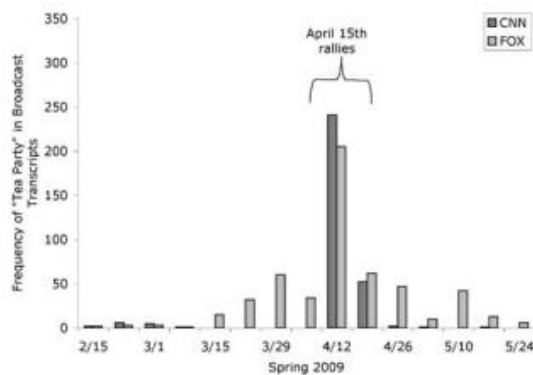
Lastly, regarding cable news viewership overall, in 2015 the average prime-time viewership of CNN, Fox News and MSNBC was just over three million and the average daytime viewership was just under 2 million (Holcomb 2016). However, arguably a statistic that more accurately highlights the prominence of cable news in today’s political environment is a 2016 Pew Research Center survey which asked US adults to name out of eleven news sources, which one was the most helpful to them in learning about the presidential election in the past week. Cable TV news, which received 24%, was

considered the most helpful and was ten percentage points higher than social media, the second most popular source (Gottfried, Barthel, Shearer and Mitchell 2016).

Domineering Policy Demanders

With Mezey's assumption validated, I will move on to discuss how the Tea Party movement harnessed the democratized media environment to its advantage, beginning with the prominent role the democratized media played in the foundation of the movement. In February of 2009, CNBC reporter Rick Santelli began ranting at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange against the Obama Administration's bailout package; he proclaimed, "the government is rewarding bad behavior" and ended by inviting the public to a "Chicago Tea Party" as a means of protest (Williamson et al. 2011, 26). "Web-savvy conservatives," who had been waiting for an opportunity like this for quite some time, "recognized rhetorical gold when they saw it" and quickly utilized social media platforms to spread the word that the Tea Party movement had begun (Williamson et al. 2011, 26). In a matter of moments, the conservative blogosphere and social media platforms like Twitter, were flooded with videos of Santelli's rant and comments, inviting fellow conservative activists to join in a collective protest under the newly coined "Tea Party" name (Williamson et al. 2011, 26). Quickly these channels dispersed their message, aided by a conservative website, the Drudge Report, that also posted Santelli's rant and proclamation (Williamson et al. 2011, 26). As evidence of how the democratized media environment allows for the spread of rapid awareness, within twenty-four hours the White House Press Secretary, Robert Gibbs, was publically commenting on the Tea Party movement (Williamson et al. 2011, 26).

From this beginning, the Tea Party relied on the democratized media in order to sustain awareness and generate continuous involvement. A Harvard University study by Vanessa Williamson, Theda Skocpol and John Coggin found that one of the most influential outlets for generating awareness and support for the Tea Party was Fox News. Their argument is supported by a temporal analysis that compares CNN coverage to Fox News coverage (see fig. 6), illustrating that the first major spike in coverage for CNN occurred on April 15, 2009 (during the Tax Day rallies) while “Fox News shows significant and growing coverage in the lead-up to the April rallies” (Williamson et al. 2011, 29). Additionally, Fox news even claimed ownership over Tea Party events in early 2009, calling them “FNC [Fox News Channel] Tea Parties,” and Fox hosts such as Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, Greta Van Susteren and Neil Cavuto broadcast from Tea Party events, with Glenn Beck actually cosponsoring one of the largest Tea Party rallies on September 12, 2009 (Williamson et al. 2011, 30). Their argument is supported by CBS/ NYT poll data that found that 63% of Tea Party supporters watch Fox News, in comparison to the mere 11% percent of total respondents who watch the program (Williamson et al. 29). In sum, it is clear that Fox News played a “crucial role in forging the shared beliefs and collective identity around which Tea Parties have united” (Williamson et al. 2011, 29).

Figure 6: Comparing Weekly Coverage of the Tea Party by Fox News and CNN

Source: Williamson et al. 2011

Occupy Wall Street was also reliant on the democratized media environment since its very beginning. As was previously mentioned, the movement can be traced back to a viral blog post by *Adbusters* magazine on July 13, 2015 (Chappell 2011). However, what was arguably most important about the post was the inclusion of the hash tag, #occupywallstreet, which allowed individuals to repost and generate calls to action on many different platforms \ united through the hashtag (Chappell 2011). After this initial phase, the official Occupy website launched on July 26, in addition to other Occupy pages on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr; all of which were utilized to publicize the foundational September 17th demonstration (Chappell 2011).

Throughout this whole process, the traditional media devoted virtually no coverage to Occupy. When Occupiers set up camp in Zuccotti Park on September 17th and for the following eight days after, not one of the major print outlets ran any stories mentioning the protest (DeLuca et al. 2012, 488). In fact, the first story to run in a major print outlet was not until September 25th, when the *New York Times* Metro Desk printed an article entitled, “Gunning for Wall Street, With Faulty Aim” (DeLuca et al. 2012,

488). Additionally, this blackout in coverage not only occurred in print outlets but also in broadcast outlets; none of the major television networks covered the movement for the first ten days after protestors converged on Zuccotti Park (DeLuca et al. 2012, 490).

Thus, Occupiers were tasked with generating their own awareness. One of the key indications of how prominent the Internet and social media were to their movement was that even though the Occupy campsite was without frills, right from the beginning they made sure the site had its own Wi-Fi (Chappell 2011). This allowed protestors with smart phones, laptops and iPads to become what Kevin M. DeLuca, Sean Lawson and Ye Sun, who studied the media frames of the Occupy movement, called “panmedia outlet[s]” (DeLuca et al. 2012, 487). They define the protestors as such because each one had the ability to become “decentered knot[s] of video, photographs and blogging” documenting from their own individual tents in Zuccotti Park, and reaching “millions of people throughout the Twittiverse and Facebook and YouTube and the world;” all possible without tapping into the mainstream media (DeLuca et al. 2012, 487). Therefore, if you search Google blogs for mentions of Occupy Wall Street from September 17th to October 17th 2015, you get over 10 million results (DeLuca et al. 2012, 492). In fact, PeopleBrowser (a social analytics company) estimates that on the first day of Occupy alone, Twitter mentions were around 4,300; by September 25, those numbers had climbed to 9,466; to 25,148 by October 2 and to 47,856 by October 14 (DeLuca et al. 2012, 500).

Domineering Politicians

Before delving into how Trump and Sanders used the democratized media, I will first demonstrate that their embrace of the democratized media set them apart from the other 2016 presidential candidates and previous candidates. One way of demonstrating this point is by looking at how many Facebook likes and twitter re-tweets this year's candidates received in comparison to the 2012 presidential candidates. Pew Research Center studied the social media responses of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney for fourteen days from June 4-17, 2012. In this range, Obama received 1,124,175 Facebook likes and 150, 106 re-tweets ("How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and Social Media" 2012). Romney received 633,597 Facebook likes and 8,601 re-tweets ("How the Presidential Candidates" 2012). When Pew conducted a similar study of Trump and Sanders for a three-week period from May 11 to 31, 2016, Trump received 9,610,625 Facebook reactions— almost nine times as many likes as Obama in 2012 and fifteen times as many as Romney— and 1,427,280 twitter re-tweets ("Campaigns as a Direct Source of News" 2016). Additionally, Sanders received 3,533,130 Facebook likes— three times as many as Obama and six times as many as Romney— and 605,898 Twitter re-tweets ("Election 2016: Campaigns as a Direct Source of News" 2016). When comparing Trump and Sanders to the other 2016 presidential candidates, by February 8, 2016 Trump had amassed the largest amount of Twitter followers and Facebook likes than other candidate: both more than 5 million (Crist and Petrakovitz 2016). Sanders amassed around 2.5 million Twitter followers and Facebook likes, surpassed only by Clinton when it came to Twitter followers and Carson when it came to Facebook likes (Crist and Petrakovitz 2016).

Mezey (2017) argues that Trump's ability to master the media environment greatly set him apart. Duncan Watts, principle researcher at Microsoft, studies the effect of big-seed marketing, which he argues allows a "message [to] spread faster and more systematically if 'seeded' among many people" (Brickart et al. 2017). Big-seed marketing is contrasted with the viral approach, which is when an "epidemic" of interest is created after targeting a few core influencers (Brickart et al. 2017). Watts explains that Trump exploited his concept of big-seed marketing because he came into the election already with 19 million Twitter followers, 18 million Facebook fans and almost 5 million followers on Instagram (Brickart et al. 2017). Therefore, every time he posted something on social media it was spread rapidly and systematically by his vast "seedbed" and also picked up by print and televised media (as evident from a prior discussion of his free media coverage) (Brickart et al. 2017). For example, over the three week period that Pew studied the social media behavior of Trump, Sanders and Clinton, while all three candidates averaged similar posting rates (around five to seven daily posts on Facebook and eleven to twelve daily Tweets) Trump's posts were re-tweeted almost 6,000 times on average compared to 2,500 for Sanders and 1,500 for Clinton; further, Pew concluded that "in every measurable category of user attention—Facebook shares, comments, reactions, as well as twitter re-tweets—the public responded to Donald Trump's social media updates on average more frequently than to either of the other candidates posts ("Election 2016: Campaigns as a Direct Source of News" 2016).

Trump's platform of choice was Twitter, and he knew precisely how to use the medium to garner the most attention. Since Twitter only allows 140 characters, it is a platform that encourages provocative messages and "invites controversy"— Trump

understood thus and he understood that complicit, mild tweets would simply not receive the same kind of buzz that controversial tweets would (Brickart et al. 2017). One way he did this was by targeting influential individuals and purposely sparking confrontation; two examples include his tweet attacks on Meryl Streep and Mitt Romney (Brickart et al. 2017). Last, Trump used social media platforms to solidify his authenticity— the cornerstone of his campaign (Brickart et al. 2017). Unlike previous media savvy presidential candidates, like former President Obama, Trump did not use Twitter as a mass mobilization technique, but rather a way to “address his audience directly as individuals” (Brickart et al. 2017). His off-the-cuff, regular Joe, unfiltered comments allowed his supporters to feel as if they were interacting with him directly, a huge change from press secretaries or official statements, which is how members of the public are used to interacting with their politicians (Brickart et al. 2017).

While Trump’s media strategy focused on the value of authenticity, Bernie Sanders’ new media strategy was highlighted for its overall innovation. The hashtag, #feelthebern, averaged more than 2,000 re-tweets per hour, outperforming Clinton’s, #imwithher at 425 re-tweets per hour and Trump’s, #Trump2016 at 729 re-tweets per hour (Holmes 2016). According to social analytics firm Hootsuite, which analyzed the Sanders campaign ability to generate impact by looking at several factors including his high re-tweet rate and Facebook likes as well as a qualitative analysis of his campaign’s ability to inspire spin-off social media efforts, Sanders highly innovative social media campaign warranted him a score of 24/30 for impact (Holmes 2016). For a point of comparison, Hootsuite gave Clinton an impact score of just 20/30 because Clinton built a

stronger Twitter following than Sanders but his ability to generate more Facebook likes his overall more innovative media campaign, generated greater impact (Holmes 2016).

One notable example of Bernie's innovative social media presence was first and foremost his use of Snapchat; in fact, Sanders was the first Democratic candidate ever to advertise on Snapchat (Shields 2016). Specifically, the Sanders campaign organized their own Bernie Snapchat filter leading up to the Iowa Caucuses, prompting Snapchat's first time run of a geo-filter for that many days in a row (Shields 2016). Additionally, also during the Iowa Caucuses, the Sanders campaign spent than \$350,000 in ads on Facebook and Instagram, representing "one of the largest and most aggressive advertising campaigns ever undertaken by a political campaign" on these two platforms, and this aggressive campaign helped them reach more than 750,000 people (Corasaniti 2016). Specifically, the Sanders campaign took advantage of a new Facebook advertising tool called the Facebook Canvass (Corasaniti 2016). Canvass ad- units load faster than anything else on the Facebook page and give off the look and feel of an app; the Sanders campaign was the first political campaign to advertising using the Facebook Canvass (Corasaniti 2016). Overall, it is evident that both Trump and Sanders effectively harnessed the democratized media environment to bypass traditional media gatekeepers.

D. Top-Down Realignment:

Decline in Party Prominence

First, the rise in party "outsider candidates" running for the presidency from 2008 on illustrates the parties' inability to control the presidential nomination process. This trend can be traced back to Barack Obama, who in many ways embodied the idea of a

party outsider when he ran for the presidency the first time. Before Obama's victory in 2008, "the ticket to a major party presidential nomination since John F. Kennedy ha[d] been a well-seasoned national pedigree or a stint in a governor's mansion" (Hulse 2016). Instead, former President Obama announced his intention to run after spending less than three years as a Senator, boasting of little legislative or executive experience (Hulse 2016). In fact, his allies on the Hill urged him to run for president "precisely because he had spent such a short time in Washington that he had not built up the legislative record or earned the insider image that could weigh him down" (Hulse 2016). Obama's victory in 2008 broke a well-established pattern of party insider after party insider clenching the White House, arguably paving the way for numerous other outsiders to run for our country's highest office (Hulse 2016).

In 2012, party outsiders who ran in the Republican primary included former CEO of Godfather Pizza, Herman Cain and a Tea Party leader with a "scant legislative record," Michelle Bachman ("Republican Presidential Candidates;" Hennessey 2011). In 2016, the two most prominent examples of party outsider candidates came from both sides of the aisle: Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. Additionally, the Republican primaries were littered with outsider candidates such as Ben Carson, a retired neurosurgeon, and Carly Fiorina, a businesswoman who has never held a position in elective office (Rucker 2015). One could even argue Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz could also be considered party outsiders as both of them only held "meager records of public service" before mounting their respective campaigns (Mezey 2017, 8).

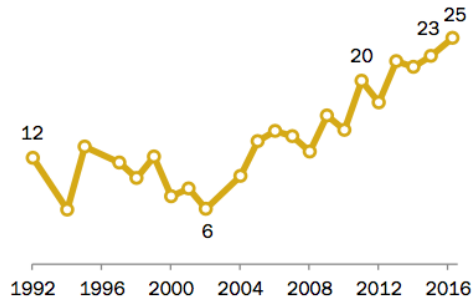
Perhaps even more compelling than listing off the names of outsiders in order to show that the Establishment has lost their grip on the nomination process is to reference

the quick and fatal downfall of Jeb Bush's candidacy. The "son and brother of former presidents, the grandson of a U.S. Senator" and the man with money to burn, Bush epitomized the Republican Establishment and thus appeared to have the recipe for success (Stokols 2016). But that of course was the old playbook, which had been challenged by President Obama in 2008 and then was completely thrown out come 2016; instead 2016, as a Republican operative close to the Bush family said, the "rules all changed" and this year was "all about taking on the establishment," clear evidence that the parties were certainly not the ones in control of the nomination process (Stokols 2016).

Second, an analysis of poll data illustrates the parties' inability to foster respect in the electorate. When Pew asked respondents in 2016 how favorably they feel towards both parties (see fig. 7), 25% responded that they have an unfavorable view of both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party— a quarter of the American public ("GOP's Favorability Rating Edges Lower" 2016). In 2008, approximately 12% of respondents held unfavorable views towards both parties and by 2012 the percentage had jumped to 18%; however this year's percentage stands as the highest percentage of unfavorable opinion since 1992 ("GOP's Favorability Rating Edges Lower" 2016). Similarly, according to Gallup poll data from 2015 (see fig. 8), both parties received less than 50% favorable opinions: a mere 38% of Americans had a favorable opinion of the Republican Party and 43% had a favorable opinion of the Democratic party (Norman 2015).

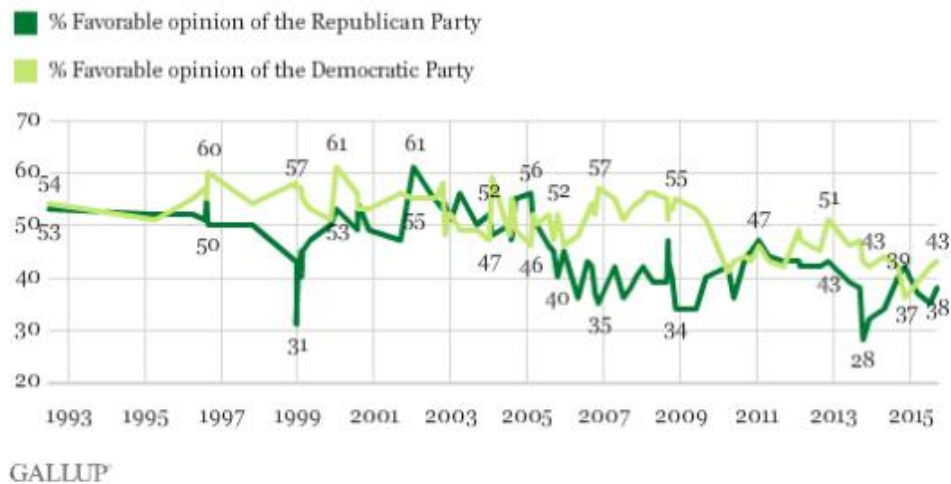
Figure 7: Unfavorable Views of Both Parties**A quarter of the public has an unfavorable view of both parties**

% saying they have an unfavorable view of BOTH the Republican Party and the Democratic Party



Source: Pew Research Center merged data. Data for 1992-2015 based on yearly averages, data for 2016 based on survey conducted April 12-19, 2016.

Source: “GOP’s Favorability Rating Edges Lower” 2016

Figure 8: Favorable Opinions of Each Party

Source: Norman 2015

Two other measures echo these results. First, a tell-tail poll question that has been used to quantify public sentiment on the importance of political parties throughout time asks respondents which party they believe would do a better job of handling the country’s

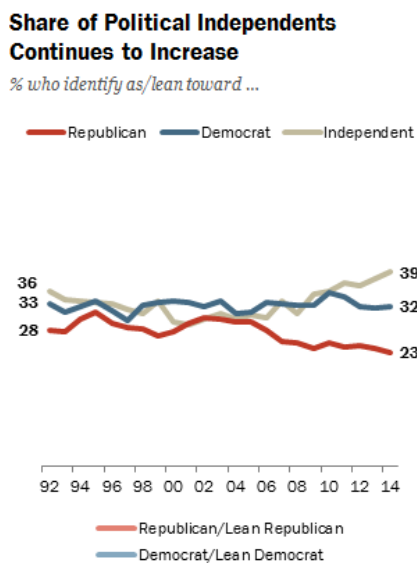
most important problem. In 2008 and continuing on to 2015, when Gallup asked respondents this question, neither party received more than 50% support (Newport 2011; Norman 2015). In 2008, the Republican Party polled at approximately 31% and the Democratic Party polled at approximately 46%; and in 2015, the Republican Party polled at 42% and the Democratic Party polled at 37% (Newport 2011; Norman 2015). For my purposes it doesn't matter which party is perceived as more capable, but rather that both parties polled at less than 50%, illustrating the public sees both parties as unimportant and unable when it comes to handling the country's most important problem.

Additionally, another statistic that illustrates the public lack of respect for the existing political parties is the growing desire for a mainstream third party. If the public felt confident in the existing parties, there would be little to no support for adding a third party; yet, we have witnessed the opposite, as there has been a rise in the desire for third party candidates since 2008. In 2008, when Gallup asked respondents: "*in your view, do the Republican and Democratic parties do an adequate job of representing the American people, or do they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed?*" 47% answered that they believed a third party was needed (Jones 2008). However, in 2016 a majority of Americans— 57%— responded that a third major US party is needed (Jones 2016). This figure is ten percentage points higher than it was during the presidential election of '08.

Related to the parties' inability to generate the respect of the electorate, poll data also illustrates the parties' inability to generate loyal partisanship— the third criterion of devolution in party prominence. One measure is the increase in independent voters over time. According to Pew Research Center polling, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of Americans who identify as independent over the past decade (see fig. 9).

In 2008, 36% identified as Democrat, 32% as Independent and 25% as Republican (“A Deep Dive into Party Affiliation” 2015). By 2014, the share of independent voters had grown by seven percentage points to 39%, a higher percentage than either the Democrats (32%) or the Republicans (23%). Gallup polling data from 2015 reveals an even sharper increase in the percent of independents: 42% of Americans identifying as independents, 29% as Democrats and 26% as Republicans (Jones 2016). According to Gallup’s polling data, 2015 marked the fifth consecutive year that over 40% of Americans identified as independent (Jones 2016). In sum, if the parties were able to cultivate loyal partisans, we would not have a public polling at record highs for independent identification.

Figure 9: Increase in Political Independents



Source: “A Deep Dive into Political Affiliation” 2015

Additional evidence for the parties’ inability to cultivate loyal partisans comes from an analysis of how partisans feel towards their *own* party. In 2016, only 23% of Republicans and 26% of Democrats responded that their own party makes them feel enthusiastic; similarly, only 16% of Republicans and 26% of Democrats responded that

their own party makes them feel proud (“Partisanship and Political Animosity” 2016). True partisans would certainly exhibit much higher feelings of enthusiasm in and pride for their own party. Further, when this data is broken down by level of engagement—specifically, looking at how members of the public who are considered to be “highly politically engaged” with their respective party—feel towards their party, one finds very similar results. A mere 12% of highly engaged Republicans responded that they feel “proud” of the Republican Party and only 19% responded that they feel enthusiastic about their party (“Partisanship and Political Animosity” 2016). Those in the Democratic Party echoed these sentiments: only 36% of highly engaged Dems responded as feeling enthusiastic toward their party and only a mere 33% feel proud of the Party (“Partisanship and Political Animosity” 2016). Since these are the members of the public that are the most invested in party politics, one would expect that of all people they would harbor the warmest feelings about their respective party.

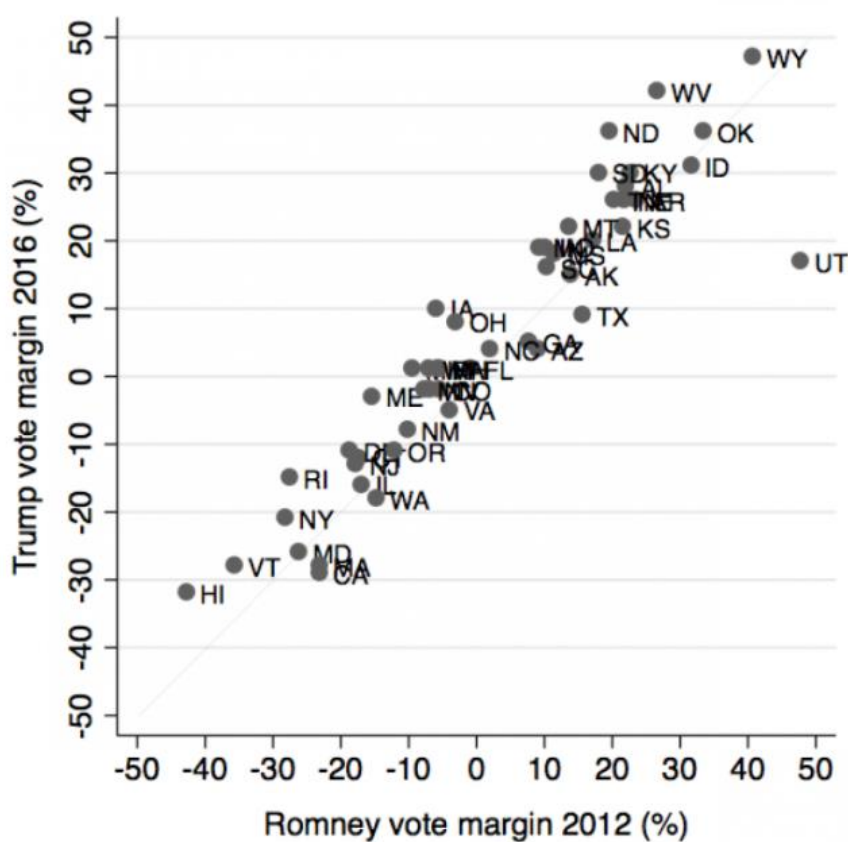
“Top-Down-ness”

H (Alternate A): The 2016 election represents a critical election and will result in critical realignment of the party system.

The first criterion for a critical election is that there are disruptions of traditional voting patterns; specifically, that as much as a “fifth to a third of voters” shift their partisan allegiance for one party to the other (Burnham 1970, 6). According to national CNN exit poll data, this did not occur in 2016. First, 89% of Democrats voted for Clinton, with only a mere 9% voting for Trump, and in regards to Republicans, 90% voted for Trump and only 7% voted for Clinton (Huang et al. 2016). Both 9% and 7% are

figures below 20% and certainly below 33%: the kind of percentages required by Burnham to show that significant partisan switching has occurred. Additionally, these percentages almost perfectly map the percentages from the election of 2008 (the last election without an incumbent) when 89% of Democrats voted for Obama and 90% of Republicans voted for McCain (“Exit Polls” 2008). According to national exit poll data, it is clear that the electorate exhibited a standard level of “partisan stability,” not partisan switching (Bartels 2016).

This partisan stability was evident on the state level as well as most “state election outcomes were also surprisingly consistent with past voting patterns” (Bartels 2016). Political Scientist Larry Bartels from Vanderbilt University, mapped out the relationship between Trump’s popular vote margins in each state compared to Romney’s 2012 (see fig. 10). What he found was that Utah was the only state that had a popular vote margin shift that was larger than sixteen points; every other state the popular vote margin shifted by less than sixteen points (Bartels 2016). Sixteen points is equal to only 8% of the electorate, which again is not indicative of the kind of dramatic shifts that Burnham explained are required for characterization as a critical election (Bartels 2016). Overall, the correlation between Romney’s 2012 results and Trump’s 2016 is 0.93—evidence of very strong similarities in state-by-state voting patterns in the two elections (Bartels 2016). In sum, both national and state-by-state data illustrates that the kinds of partisan shifts that Burnham argues must occur with a critical election, did not happen in this year’s race.

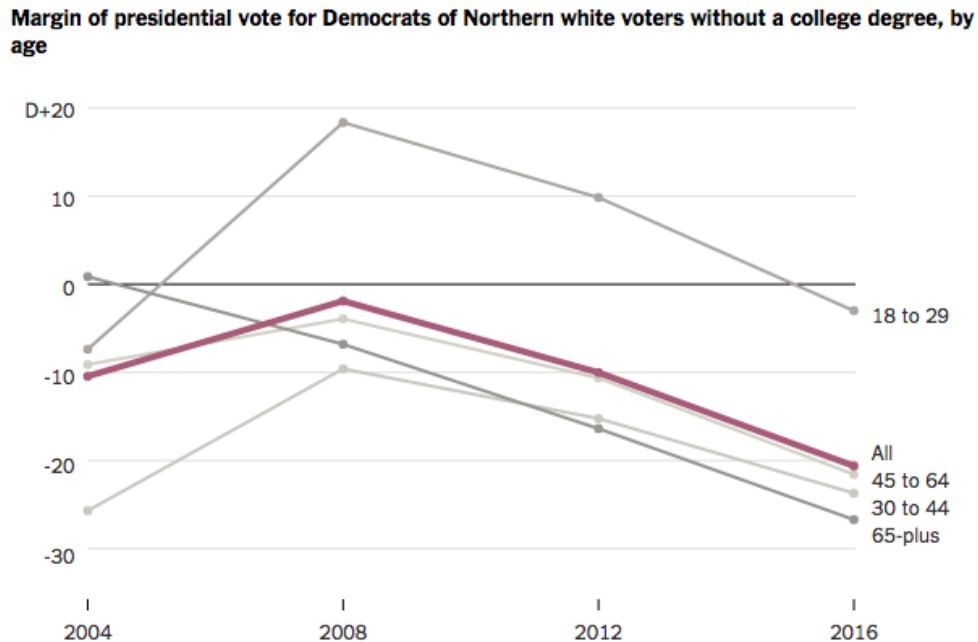
Figure 10: Comparing Popular Vote Margins for Romney in '12 and Trump in '16

Source: Bartels 2016

After the results of this election, there has been a lot of commentary regarding the partisan shifting of one particular demographic group— white voters without college degrees. What is particularly interesting about this demographic cohort is that many of them helped propel Obama into the White House in both 2008 and 2012, while also helping to propel Trump into the White House in 2016. In 2008, Obama was able to capture enough support from Northern whites without college degrees, effectively forcing the Republican margin of support with that particular demographic to zero (Cohn 2016). However, Figure 11 shows that in 2016 Trump was able to push the Republican advantage to +20 (Cohn 2016). Specifically, Trump was able to pull together a coalition

of support that not only included conservative whites from the expected places like the South and West but also Northern whites without college degrees in states such as Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania, that once represented the “heartlands of 20th-century liberal population” (Confessore and Cohn 2016).

Figure 11: Trump’s Gains with Northern Whites Without a College Degree



Source: Cohn 2016

However, the essential point is that numerically, these shifts are still not significant enough to fulfill Burnham’s requirement for a critical election. According to exit poll data, white voters without college degrees comprise 34% of the US population (Huang et al. 2016). From the election in 2008 to the election of 2016, 21% of this 34% shifted their vote from the Democrats to the Republicans (Huang et al.). Simple math (.21 X .34) shows that this shift is only equal to 7.14% of the total population— a percentage, which is still far below Burnham’s requirement of at least a fifth to a third of voters switching their partisan allegiance. Additionally, even from a non-numerical standpoint,

these shifts do not provide evidence of criterion one but rather support my top-down realignment hypothesis. This is because whites without college degrees that choose to switch their votes did not do so because of a newfound desire to affirm their allegiance to the Republican Party; they did so because of a desire to affirm their allegiance to Trump. Casting a vote for Trump and casting a vote for the Republican Party are distinct because as was already discussed at length, Trump represents a domineering politician, who by definition is not representative of the traditional Republican Party. Thus, the fact that Northern non-college educated whites may have voted for Obama in '08 and '12 but then voted for Trump in '16, is not evidence of partisan switching, but rather evidence of the compelling nature that a domineering politician can have on the electorate. In sum, criterion one is not supported and further support is provided for my top-down hypothesis.¹¹

The second criterion is that there must be must be “abnormally high intensity,” during the election, which is characterized as the parties’ nominating processes adding to the tension and polarization as opposed to providing organization and order (Burnham 1970, 6-7). From a qualitative standpoint, the 2016 primaries appeared to be uniquely chaotic, on both sides of the aisle. To begin with, the Republican primary had seventeen presidential contenders— an almost unheard of number. For comparison purposes, in both 2008 and 2012, the Republican Party had eleven presidential candidates and in 2008, the Democratic Party had nine candidates (“Republican Presidential Candidates;” “Election

¹¹ As was already mentioned, requirement of all four conditions are necessary in order classify 2016 as critical election. Therefore, since criterion one is unsupported, I could stop my analysis here, effectively showing that 2016 cannot be classified as critical. However, to further solidify my argument, I will continue to analyze the three remaining criteria.

2008”). Bret Baier, chief political anchor for Fox News, noted the remarkable nature of seventeen candidates when he said, “it’s definitely not like anything anyone has seen before” (Pecht 2016). On the Democratic side, as was already discussed at length, Sanders’ refusal to concede to Hillary even when it was numerically impossible for him to win, in addition to his repeated comments about the unfair and corrupt nature of Democratic nominating processes, led many to question long-standing Democratic Party processes. On both the Republican and Democratic side “ordinarily accepted ‘rules of the game’ [were] flouted [and] the party’s processes, instead of performing their usual integrative functions, themselves contribute[d] to polarization” (Burnham 1970, 7). Yet, this chaotic nominating process did *not* inspire primary voting turnout that we saw during the election of 2008. According to Pew, overall voting participation in the primaries was still lower than in 2008 at 30.4% and 28.5%, respectively (Desilver 2016). Therefore, while from a qualitative perspective it appears that the nominating processes were “abnormal” in their level of intensity, from a quantitative standpoint since levels of primary voting participation did not manage to surpass 2008 levels, fulfillment of criterion two remains inconclusive.

Regarding the third criterion— whether or not there was significant increase in political polarization— the data very clearly show that criterion three is fulfilled. Pew Research data shows that “for the first time in surveys dating back to the 1992, [in 2016] majorities in both parties express not just unfavorable but very unfavorable views of the other party” (“Partisanship and Political Animosity” 2016). Specifically, polls show that 58% of Republicans held a very unfavorable opinion of the Democratic Party, which is a significant increase from 32% in 2008 (“Partisanship and Political Animosity” 2016).

Similarly, 55% of Democrats held a very unfavorable view of the Republican Party, which was also up from 2008, when only 37% responded in this way (“Partisanship and Political Animosity” 2016). Additionally, 86% of the public believed that the country is deeply divided in 2016, which is an enormous increase from 2008, when this percentage was only in the 40s.

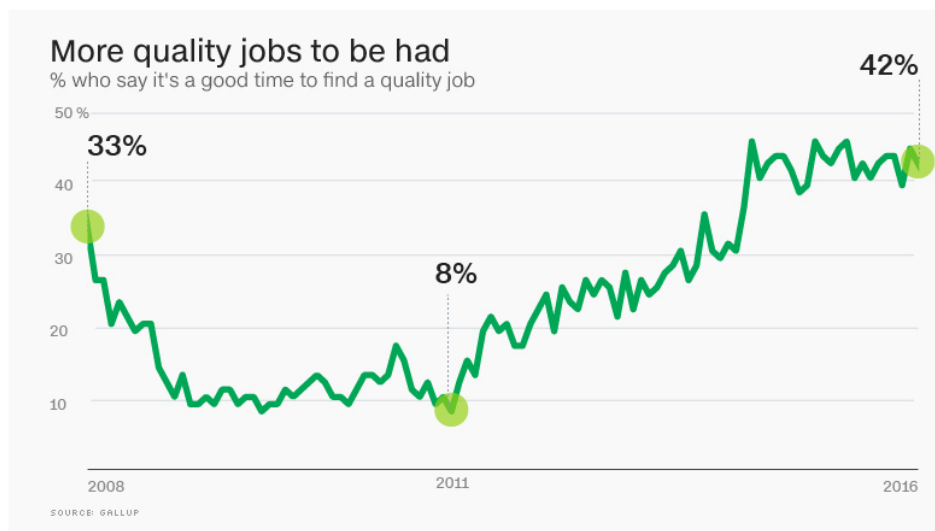
Finally, we did not experience comparatively high degrees of voting participation in this election– the fourth condition of a critical election. According to CNN exit poll data, voting turnout in the 2016 election was at its “lowest point in two decades” (Wallace 2016). Only 55.4% of the Voting Eligible Population (VEP) of Americans voted, according to calculations as of November 10, 2016 (Wallace 2016). This is almost a ten-percentage point drop from 2008, when 63.7% of the VEP cast votes (Wallace 2016). In fact, the 2016 voting turnout was “the lowest in a presidential election since 1996” (Wallace 2016). Therefore, it is abundantly clear that this election did not represent a high degree of voting participation. In conclusion, while criterion three was fulfilled all four conditions were not upheld, therefore the 2016 presidential election cannot be classified as critical and Alternate Hypothesis A is rejected.

H (Alternate B): The 2016 election represents another step towards solidifying the secular realignment caused by conflict displacement.

In order for a conflict displacement to occur, a “broad” and “deep” conflict must be present. The conflict that immediately comes to mind in regards to this election is the Recession of 2008; however, an analysis of poll data illustrates that the Recession of 2008 was neither broad nor deep in the minds of voters, leading up to nor during this

election. Specifically, in 2010 a Fox poll found that 55% percent of registered voters felt the US economy was still in a recession, yet in June of 2015, leading up to the 2016 presidential election, only a mere 22% of voters gave this response (Bowman and Sims 2015). Additionally, a 2016 Gallup poll found that 42% of respondents believe that 2016 is a good time to find a quality job (see fig. 12); not only is this percentage almost equivalent to the pre-Recession 2007 values, but also it is certainly a significant increase from the 33% who responded that way in 2008 and the mere 8% that responded that way in 2011 (Luhby 2016). If leading up and during the election Americans felt that the Recession of 2008 was still a relevant conflict, far more than 22% would respond that the US was still in a recession and not nearly as many as 42% would respond that 2016 is a good time to find a quality job.

Figure 12: Gallup Poll showing Percent of Respondents Who Believe Now is a Good Time to Find a Quality Job



Source: Luhby 2016

To further illustrate that the Recession of 2008 was neither perceived as a broad nor deep conflict during this election, I reference a Pew 2016 poll which asked the public

to “*please name the 10 historic events that occurred in YOUR lifetime that you think have had the greatest impact on the country*” (Deane et. al 2016). This poll found that the top eleven responses from all respondents did not include the Recession of 2008 (Deane et al. 2016). In sum, three distinct measures show that Recession of 2008 was not a broad and deep issue in play in the 2016 presidential election.

Further, it is important to entertain the possibility that there may have been another broad and deep issue in play besides the Recession of 2008. However, according to Pew, poll data shows that there was not one defining issue for voters during this election; instead, the top four issues– the economy (84%), terrorism (80%), foreign policy (75%), and health care (74%)– where all within a ten percentage points from one another, indicating that not one issue was prominent enough to stand out in the minds of voters (“2016 Campaign: Strong Interest” 2016). In sum, neither the Recession of 2008 nor any other issue is able to qualify as both broad and deep– a necessity for the occurrence of conflict displacement. Thus, Alternate Hypothesis B is also unsupported.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

I began my study with the hope of shedding some light on what happened during the 2016 presidential election and what this means for the fate of the American party system. An in-depth analysis of both historic and contemporary scholarship on American political parties, party systems, and theories of realignment helped inform the direction I chose to take in dealing with such a broad and multi-faceted question.

While Silbey (1990) argued that party prominence has been in decline since the end of the 19th century, the time of the end of the political machines, my analysis takes his theory one step further; I argue that that the prominent American political party, as an institution fundamental to our political process, has reached a point of nonexistence. For some time, the parties have not held absolute control over the presidential nomination process; yet they still had the power to establish parameters that individuals were required to achieve in order to contest for the nomination. However, as evidence by the rise of outsider candidates since 2008, the parties have lost their ability to vet the candidates poised to represent them, effectively losing all power in regards to the nomination process. Additionally, as evidence by the cold feelings the public harbors towards both parties and the public's lack of trust in them, today's political parties are unable to foster respect in the electorate. Last, as evidence by the fact that the members of the public considered to be the most "highly engaged" do not feel pride in or enthusiasm for their respective party, today's political parties have also lost their ability to cultivate loyal partisanship. Overall, today's political parties are devoid of the three conditions of party prominence. Thus, the first major finding of my research is that Silbey's devolution

in prominence of party has finally come to an end because today— prominent political parties are dead.

Second, my research shows that the death of the prominent political party was not spurred by a traditional, bottom-up realignment, such as a critical election or conflict displacement. My data analysis illustrates that the presidential election of 2016 was not a critical election because not all four required conditions of a critical election were present; specifically, no major disruptions in traditional voting patterns occurred, and there was not a high level of voting participation in comparison to past elections. Regarding an increase in the intensity of the nomination process, the data remain inconclusive; the only condition that was definitively present was an increase in political polarization. Similarly, the conditions necessary for conflict displacement were also not present during the 2016 election; specifically, neither the Recession of 2008 nor any other potential issue was able to qualify as both a broad and deep conflict, relevant to the election of 2016.

Instead, my research suggests that the death of the prominent political party was spurred from the top-down. Specifically, I zeroed in on and adapted variables from contemporary realignment scholars (Aldrich 1995 and Cohen et al. 2008) to look at how domineering policy demanders, like the Tea Party Movement and Occupy Wall Street, and domineering politicians, like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, were able to inspire such remarkable disruptions in the American party system. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, I trace the decline of party back to 2008 when democratized media (Mezey 2017)—from FOX News to Twitter and everything in between— infiltrated the political world, providing domineering policy demanders and politicians with 21st century

soapboxes, allowing them to raise their voices and spread their messages, free from the heavy-hand of the traditional media gatekeepers.

To some, the withering away of the American political party may not sound like such a bad thing. As was made blatantly clear throughout the election of 2016, both presidential candidates and members of the electorate alike are “wedded to an anti-establishment narrative” (Rauch 2016). However, the fact that we have reached an age in which political parties are no longer prominent is not a time for celebration but rather a time for sober contemplation.

Political parties are the lifeblood of a living and breathing democracy. While the American Constitution makes no mention of organized parties, political parties were formed precisely in the name of ensuring the stability of our Republic: “if the Constitution was the system’s DNA, the parties... were its RNA, translating the Founders’ bare bones framework into dynamic organizations and converting conflict into action” (Rauch 2016). As Burnham and Chambers warn, “parties and party systems... are essential parts of a viable democratic polity in a complex society; without the role party systems play in ordering political activity and facilitating the political process... these polities would scarcely endure as functioning entities” (1967, 10-11). As Morris P. Fiorina argues, “the only way collective responsibility has ever existed, and can exist given our institutions, is through the agency of the political party; in American politics, responsibility requires cohesive parties” (Aldrich 2011, 3). And as E.E. Schattsneider states, in perhaps the most illustrative quote of them all, “political parties created democracy, and democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties” (Aldrich 2011, 3).

This is not to say that the established political party system prior to the election of 2016 was perfect— in fact, it was far from it. Further, as history illustrates, disruptions in the established party system are essential to the functioning of American politics. For example, the election of 1860 ushered in the newly minted Republican Party, thus providing a new party system that was finally able to deal with the elephant in the room, the slavery issue. Similarly, the election of 1932 brought FDR to the White House and a huge sigh of relief for the millions of those suffering from the shocks of the Great Depression. Both of these were critical elections that catalyzed critical realignments: what Burnham calls the people’s “chief tension management device” and the “chief means through which an underdeveloped political system can be recurrently brought once again into some balanced relationship with the changing socioeconomic system, permitting a re-stabilization of our politics” (1970, 181).

Yet, healthy disruptions of the party system, such as critical elections leading to critical realignments and/or the occurrence of critical displacement, **require** prominent political parties. In large and diverse republics such as ours, organization is essential in order to bind people together to impact significant political change. Without organization, without structure and without collective action, the voices of the people are not empowered; instead it is the voices of the few.

Leading up to and during the election of 2016 it was domineering policy demanders and domineering politicians who pushed the institution of the American political party to its breaking point— spurring change from the top-down, what I consider to be unhealthy and anti-democratic change. The realignment of 2016 is distinct from every other realignment in our history, save one, because it was spurred by elites and not

the masses. The only other top-down realignment in our long and complicated political history was the first party system: created by elites for elites, where the political parties were virtually powerless and instead, the power was held tightly by a select few, those who had very little connection with the rest of the populace (Chambers and Burnham 1967; Brewer and Maisel 2016). Thus, the top-down realignment of 2016 serves as foil to every other realignment in our history: instead of being progressive, righting a teetering political system, it is distinctly regressive, throwing us dangerously off course.

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